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(*See page* 61)

A NORTHUMBRIAN IN ARMS

GEORGE S. SURREY

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CHAPTER THE FIRST

A Mad Frolic

'Twas a fine April morning in the year 1054, and it chanced, it being Saint's day, that at the village of Saltersby, or rather a little without it, not more than a brisk hour's walk from the town and lordship of Bourne in Lincolnshire, there was being held a fair, and thither journeyed the peasant folk from miles around. Saltersby Fair was one of note, a great gathering for those who had swine or geese, or maybe beasts and horses, to dispose of, and from five counties would gather those who had traffic in such. And also the fair was meeting-place for those wandering people who won a precarious livelihood by their exhibitions of drollery, sword play, feats of strength, tumbling, and music; while those who lived by more questionable means also found their way thither, ready and willing to relieve franklin or hind, man or woman, of such money as they had and might be cozened from them by art or artifice. Of two days' duration was the fair, of which the first was given up to business and the second to pleasure.

For one whole day might the Saxon ceorls give

themselves up to pleasure, and that they did right mightily; holidays were for them of infrequent coming; saving Yuletide, they knew but few others. Life was for them a matter of scant ease or leisure, but filled with much hardship and labour, and when cessation of toil did come to them they made much of their respite.

On a stretch of common land without the village was the fair held, and those on their way thither, at leisurely speed and with much laughter and chatter, drew to one side to give passage to a party that came along the wide road, hasting in the same direction.

It was but a small party, being but seven or eight in number, but those of it made a noise equal to that from a score of ordinary folk. Also they bore themselves as if they had the right so to do.

Young men they were of ages from fifteen to twenty, all clad as became those in good circumstances; and the signs of rude courtesy which the folk they passed gave to them were proof of their holding some superior rank and of their being well known.

Too well known, be it said, were they, and heads were shaken and glances exchanged by those they passed. Wherefore might be understood were hearing to be given to what passed between the country-folk when the party had gone beyond earshot, laughing, shouting and singing as will youths bent on enjoyment.

"Rare doings at the fair to-day now," observed a tall youth to his father, who walked beside him.

"Rare, say'st thou, fool?" the man returned. "Better likely such doings as some may regret ere the day be past. Hereward's band have ne'er yet been seen at fair or feast but some have had cause to regret it."

"But they are merry withal; they mean no harm," the youth protested.

"Meaning or no they do it," his father replied. "Are they not cried upon everywhere? Merry! by Thor, yes; but when Hereward's band are merry some one else weeps, and for right good reason. What may the Lord Leofric mean by thus giving leave to his son to bear himself so and disgrace his name throughout the country-side none can tell. 'Tis shame! Such riotousness——"

"Yet the Lord Hereward is——" the youth began to object, his eye kindling and his cheek flushing; for if those older and wiser than himself grieved at the conduct for which Hereward, son of Earl Leofric and the saintly Lady Godiva, had become notorious, together with his huscarles, throughout all the wide fenland, those of lesser age, even as this youth himself, took delight in the young noble's wild and mischievous deeds.

"The Lord Hereward is graceless; and if thou wert inclined towards doing even as he does I promise thee, Gurth, that my cudgel would be laid athwart thy shoulders," the parent said sharply.

A few steps the pair went, and then said the son: "But the Lord Hereward is not with them to-day; I marked him not as they passed."

"Nay, but he hath schooled them so well they

will be but one whit the less evil in their pranks because of his absence. See thou, now that they are here 'twill be strange if there be not brawling at the fair and some go not hence with broken bones and cracked pates. We know Hereward's band of old."

The fenman spoke truth; throughout the whole country-side Hereward and his merry men, the riotous youths whose pleasure and delight it was to follow him, to give him aid and abetment in the pranks which delighted the over-proud young noble, were more notorious than liked. One can read in the chronicles of the day of how he and they ranged the land in the neighbourhood of Bourne, a great scandal to his saintly mother, the darling of the men of his father's household, and an evil example to his kindred and tenants' sons; a disturber of the peace was he, and men said 'twould not be long ere he was outlawed. And this fate, as all know, came at last to Hereward.

But this day of Saltersby Fair the band was without its chief. Hereward had been summoned to the abbey at Peterborough, whereof his uncle Brand was head, and as Brand was the only man for whom the young lord had liking or respect he had gone.

Yet the band, for all that, lacked not a leader. Geri, who was Hereward's cousin, was there, and Winter, whom Hereward called his brother in arms, and who was to seal his devotion to the young lord with his life on that day, many years hence, when the lord of Bourne died in his own orchard with a ring of thirteen corpses round

him, and William the Norman at last knew himself for king.

And besides these were Wulfric, and Wulfrade, and Azer, and Leofwine, and one lad bigger in bone, taller in stature and more abundant of hair than the rest; a lad to catch the eye of any chance beholder both for the beauty of his face and the likely proportions of his form. As Harald, son of Ulf, his companions addressed him, and there was that in him that gave evidence of the Scandinavian blood running in his veins.

A hundred years earlier two long dragon ships had sailed into what is now Whitby Harbour under the command of one, Olaf the Axebearer, who had come from his birthplace on the shores of Romsdal Fjord to find a home in England. Landing, Olaf had marched his men, having first fired his ships, into what men now call Eskdale, and there he had settled himself, greatly to the discomfort of his Saxon neighbours, but mightily to his own benefit. Within six months he was lord of all land between Rosebery Topping and the sea, and for ten miles on either side of the house he had built himself.

So strong became Olaf the Axebearer that he held his land in spite of the great Athelstan, who was the first to make himself king of all England. Nor did Edmund, brother to Athelstan, succeed in overcoming him; and when Edred, the half-brother of Athelstan, came to the throne, and deposed once and for ever the Danish rule of Northumbria, placing an alderman to govern as his deputy in the two divisions he made of

northern England, he was content to agree to the Norseman holding his lands, not, indeed, as an independent ruler, but as a direct vassal of himself.

A great-grandson in the male line direct of the Axebearer was Harald Ulfsson, and, as was not uncommon among the great families of the period, he had been sent by his father to the house of Earl Leofric, there to receive the instruction and training which service under so great a noble afforded. At Bourne he had lived for two years, but truth to tell, 'twas more the influence of Hereward than of his saint-like mother that had guided him. Daring, merry, adventurous, strong in body and shrewd of wit, the Northumbrian youth had hit the fancy of Hereward greatly, and the attraction had been mutual. In Harald Ulfsson, Hereward Leofricsson found one of like nature to his own, a companion as bold in spirit as he was an opponent in the warlike exercises whereto they gave themselves so wholeheartedly, in whom he found an equal and a comrade in his sports and games as skilful and adroit as himself. Men said that two young cocks of such spirit could not exist in the same farmyard; but, as yet, no shadow of jealousy or dislike had arisen between them.

On this, the day of Saltersby Fair, Hereward, as has been said, was not with his merry men, yet with Harald Ulfsson among them the band lacked not a leader.

Seemingly careless, yet maybe, as is so with lads, secretly proud of the interest they excited, the party made their way towards the fair-ground;

nor was it long before they made their presence noticeable. Laughing and jesting, they forced their way within a great group that stood in a semi-circle before one of the pleasure-mongers —and profit-gatherers—of the fair.

This was a man, thin of form and clad in strange and outlandish garments, whose shrewd, sharp features, black eyes, and dark skin proclaimed him a native of foreign parts, a wanderer from eastern or southern Europe, who yet had caught the trick of the rude English tongue sufficiently to enable himself to be understood of those gathered around him.

His glib tongue and skilled fingers had already worked to some purpose, though it was yet early in the forenoon, and already had he drawn from the pouches of the simple, slow-witted Saxons around him a sufficiency of coins to enable him to live comfortably for many weeks. Before him was a narrow board laid upon light trestles, and upon this stood three small goblets ; and as Harald and his companions pushed through the circle, he was trying to induce those who viewed him to guess under which of the goblets was hidden a die.

"See, my masters," cried the cunning performer, "I cover up the die with one of these goblets. You all see it plainly ; is it not so? Now it is for you to guess under which now lies hidden the die."

Their mouths agape with astonishment, the countrymen watched the foreigner's thin brown hands as they moved hither and thither above

the board, shifting with lightning-like rapidity now one and now the other of the goblets, alternately revealing and concealing the die.

"Will you play, my masters?" cried the man, ceasing his movements. "You shall each pay to me one farthing for the guessing, and to those who guess correctly where the die lies hidden will I give three farthings."

Quite unable to understand why the man should be so great a fool as to lose his money to them in so simple a fashion—for there was more than one whose sharp eyes had detected where lay the die—the countrymen answered the invitation quickly. If he were so great a fool, they had small scruple to take advantage of his simplicity. They drew closer and a score of farthings clattered on the board, while as many voices loudly proclaimed under which goblet its owner believed the die to be resting.

They were not all of like mind, though the majority were sure that 'twas under the middle cup the die lay hidden. But one man had belief that the left-hand goblet covered it. Yet he was right. The goblets were removed, and all could see for themselves that it was so.

Once again the foreigner went through his preliminary changing and interchanging of the goblets, talking the while and advertising his offer. And once more a score of farthings were thrown on his board. The previous winner desired to repeat his success, those who had lost to emulate it.

The wagerers named their goblet, and all

made their choice for that on which the winner wagered. But, behold, when the goblet was raised the board beneath was blank.

The yokels were surprised; they stared at the board; and when the trickster's quick-moving hands were again at rest, a half-dozen, maybe, wagered again. And once more they had to own themselves deceived. The smiling performer showed the die resting under the right-hand goblet, though each of the men whose farthings were gathered into his pouch would have sworn on the Scriptures he had beheld it covered by either the middle or left-hand cup.

Once more a few daring spirits risked the chance, but their eyes proved at fault; each one, and every time, named the wrong goblet. The keenness of their eyesight was not equal to the speed and dexterity of the trained performer.

And then the Englishmen waxed mad; sullen scowls set on their heavy faces, and they muttered words of abusive import.

"By my faith! but 'tis marvellous," cried one of the band of youths to his neighbour. He had lost three farthings.

"Aye, Winter," was the reply. 'You'll have to acknowledge yourself blind as an owl in daylight; you who have prided yourself on keen sight."

"And so it is," Winter retorted.

"So it seemeth," and the speaker laughed. He was one, Wulfrade of Hornbrook, his father a tenant of the Bourne manor, and he had the gift of finding much to laugh at in misfortunes,

whether to himself or others. But with it he combined that spirit of mischief which urged him to laugh at and twit the victims, a propensity which ere now had brought trouble upon him, and would again.

"Why, since you can see so well, Winter," he continued, "do you not hit upon the right goblet?"

Winter muttered angrily, flung down two farthings on the board, and intimated that the die was beneath the middle goblet. But the lad was deceived. Having shown him he was mistaken, the smiling performer lifted the left-hand covering and revealed the article.

"A plague on thee! I will try once more," shouted Winter.

He tried; three of the yokels, encouraged by his example, also tried; but they did but increase the foreigner's store of coins.

"Wilt try again, master?" the man queried; but Winter stood irresolute.

His friends urged him, the countrymen were talking loudly together, when through the crowd came the great bulk of the Northumbrian lad, Harald Ulfsson. The clever trick dancing of a man who hopped on one leg in and out of a number of hens' eggs had held his attention and withdrawn him from his friends.

"What means the pother?" he cried, as he now came upon them.

They were eager to explain the while the owner of the board went through his performance of arrangement and invitation.

"See, my lord," he cried, the title being the outcome of the foreigner's perception of the golden torque and bracelets upon Harald's neck, such ornaments being in use amongst Englishmen of noble birth. "See, my lord; under one of these goblets do I place this die, so; now I change them forward and backward, the die remaining on the table as you perceive; now they are still, so, it is for your lordship, if so minded, to declare under which goblet doth the die rest. To me is paid a coin for the guessing, and if you guess aright I repay it thrice over to the guesser."

"Why, 'tis right easy," laughed Harald, whose sharp eyes had followed the movements, "and 'twere shame to rob you so. But I will guess none the less," and he named the middle goblet.

And there in truth was the die; the foreigner had no desire to make the guessing too hard, at least, at the first.

Again Harald tried, but mayhap the brown fingers were quicker, for the lad's guess went astray. This was repeated; but when he essayed a fourth guess, the lad left the chatter wherein he had been engaged and watched closely the moving of the metal goblets.

"And now, lord, will you guess again?" asked the performer obsequiously.

"Aye, that will I," the lad answered. "The die is not under any one of them."

Very clearly he spoke so that all heard him. The Englishmen stared, the foreigner chattered

volubly, but when he would have tried to show that the lad was mistaken, Harald made a sign, and Geri and another of the band seized his arms and held him fast.

"The die is there," screamed the prisoner.

"Thou liest. Good folks, see how this cheat hath cozened ye," Harald answered.

Keener even than those of Winter, the Northumbrian's eyes had detected the trick of the cheat, and seen how, when the final manipulation of the goblets took place—he was in truth a rogue of great dexterity—the performer had gathered the die into the palm of his hand; thus, except when he chose, all who played the game were bound to be losers.

As Harald spoke he swept aside the three goblets, and beneath each there was nothing.

A roar of rage rose from them that had been so befooled. "To the pond with him, lads," shouted Harald; and Geri and Harold of Thorndyke dragged the man off.

Around him crowded the yokels, and forthwith to the pond the luckless wretch was hustled, kicking and struggling, and yelling in a tongue which to his hearers was unknown. Men struck at him; they wrenched at his clothing and spat at him. Half naked, he reached the edge of the pond—wide, shallow, and of exceeding dirtiness, and here Harald took him from Geri and the other. By his neck and one hand the lad gripped him, heaved him aloft by a great effort, and cast him clear of the rushes fringing the pond's edge, to fall with a great splashing full

into the middle of the water, the while the angered Englishmen roared cries of approbation of such treatment.

Leaving the conjurer to struggle out of the pond—if the English churls would let him—Harald and his friends hastened back to the fair-ground with many a joke and lusty laugh.

"Harald, 'tis a kite's eyes you must have," cried Winter admiringly. "I had watched but saw nought of the cheating."

"And small wonder," put in Wulfrade of Hornbrook.

"How is that, my learned one?" asked the lad.

"Because you have had too much ale."

"Nay, then, be it for that reason, Wulfrade; then you had been stone blind," Winter replied, and for once the sharp-tongued one was silent.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

The Wrestling

About the fair the lads wandered, watching the dancers, the sword and buckler players, and those men so skilled of hand that they were able to keep moving in the air all at once three balls and as many sharp-pointed knives without allowing one to fall or their own hands to be wounded. These feats, whether of dancing, swordsmanship or juggling, were to the accompaniment of music, either of flute, bagpipes, fiddle, or harp, for the English were a music-loving people, and the gleemen, as these itinerant performers were named, were as proficient musicians as they were dextrous athletes.

Here Winter created some commotion by stopping one of the bouts of sword-play and offering to fight one of the players himself. The challenge was accepted; and Winter, a stout youth, as broad almost as he was long, and with a very long reach, proved himself so skilful as to win no unstinted plaudits from the onlookers.

But when Harald, in boyish spirit of emulation of his comrade, offered to make play against both swordsmen at once if they could find him a

buckler—he had his own sword—he was received with a laugh that was echoed by the natives themselves, their acquaintance with the stomach of Hereward Leofricsson's band notwithstanding.

"You are in no earnest, young master," cried one of the sword-players in derision.

"I am," the tall Northumbrian answered coolly. "And if thou and thy friend will not take my offer I shall hold it because you are afraid of a beating."

That settled it; the players found their adversary a buckler, and the three set to work. And ere a dozen thrusts had been exchanged the youth proved himself no idle boaster. A strong parry left one of the professional swordsmen defenceless, and his comrade, Harald's sword-point at his throat, cast down his weapon in acknowledgment of defeat.

With the plaudits of the astonished onlookers ringing in his ears, Harald, with his friends, sought a corner of the fair where the deep-chested shouts and cheers of men bespoke the happening of something that stirred the blood and called for relief of overcharged feelings.

"What means it?" asked one.

And another answered, "It is there that is being wrestled for the ram and the ring which Aelfric, the steward of Bourne, hath offered for all who care to strip and try a fall."

So thither the band hurried, for by Englishmen was dearly loved the game of wrestling above all bloodless trials of strength and skill, and scarce was there a village to be found wherein were not

men who played it. And this contest for the steward's prize, which was a feature of the annual fair, was one of importance. All were free to enter; and he who bore away the prize was a favoured man, to be envied by his fellows and viewed with kindly eyes by the maidens. Within were to be seen sturdy Saxons from the midland shires, as well as the wiry fenmen and Anglo-Danes from East Anglia; and often would come from north the Humber some strong-thewed, huge-limbed giant of Scandinavian origin eager to try conclusions with the Southlanders.

Seated on the turf on the inner side of the huge ring the people had formed were the contestants; hood and smock and short coat had been thrown aside, revealing brawny, hairy arms and deep chests; the legs of some were clad in tight-fitting hose; others were naked to above the knee. All were watching with deep interest the bout in progress when the lads from Bourne came on the scene.

The two men in the ring were wrestlers of proved skill; one had been the winner of the ram the year previous, and though the disparity of bulk between him and his antagonist was great, a close and stubborn combat was looked for. Ulf, the miller of Grimsthorpe, was the one; the other, a long-nosed, long-limbed, brown and wiry man of the fens, went by the name of Leofric the Runner.

A big man was the miller, not over tall, but with wide and heavy shoulders and limbs on which the hard muscles stood up in solid knots.

Much lifting of heavy sacks had strengthened his back and loins, while his hand was of such size its grip gave promise of equalling that of the celebrated Norse giant whose clasp was so powerful he could squeeze the marrow from a bone as easily as a boy the juice from a rotten apple.

But Leofric, as well known for his wrestling skill as his speed, was a cunning wrestler, quick on his feet and guileful of heart, hard as a tanned ox-hide, yet slippery as an eel. Upon his activity, his length of limb, and greater skill he relied to conquer the burly miller. With watchful eye he walked about him, seeking for an opening yet running no risk of himself being caught at disadvantage. Hard at the work were the pair when the newcomers arrived, and the crowd made way for these to get places at the inside of the ring.

Leofric was here and there like a grasshopper, and the miller, quiet, slow, and observant, bided his time. And soon a chance came; Leofric ventured too close, there was a leap forward, and he was clipped around the right wrist. But draw him near the miller could not; and hither and thither like a bladder at the end of a string the Runner was jerked.

Suddenly there arose a wild cheer from the crowd. Leofric, seizing the restraining wrist, had suddenly darted in and struck with a long limb so that his foot caught the outside of the miller's knee; so clever the stroke and so unexpected, Ulf went sprawling sideways on the ground.

But though he fell, the miller did not loose his grip of Leofric's wrist, and he sought to drag the latter to the ground as the rules of the game permitted, there to continue the bout whereat he would have held, by reason of his greater weight and strength, an immense advantage. But the fenman refused to be so dragged, and Ulf rose to his feet. Upright he was, but yet not fairly upon his balance, when Leofric leaped at him, throwing his free arm around his bull throat, and twining both legs around the miller's sturdy limbs.

"Odin!" yelled Harald, carried away by excitement. "He has him! He has him!"

And cries of "St. Dunstan! Aoi! Aoi! Aoi!" from a hundred voices as lusty as his own, proclaimed that others, too, thought the miller's defeat possible.

Before so fierce and unexpected an onslaught the miller staggered backwards; one leg he released, but free the other from the close lock upon it he might not. Fiercely he strove to thrust the Runner from him, but the long man was not to be moved, and all the while he kept his opponent on the retreat. Soon—it was but seconds, yet to the scarce breathing onlookers hours seemed to pass—Ulf could bear up no longer; the Runner's weight was pressing upon his chest, and the leg lock on him held firmly as any vice. With a dull and heavy thud he went prone on his broad back full length, unable to turn and so avoid the fall; and on the top of him lay his conqueror.

Loud and long-continued was the cheering

Leofric gained because of his victory, and something beside cheering too; for from his pouch Harald Ulfsson took a penny and flung it to him, and of the lad's companions more than one followed his example. Breathless, the man gasped thanks; and then, turning to the vanquished miller, he frankly held forth his hand. Nor did Ulf hesitate to take it in his grip.

Then when the commotion had died away, by two and two the other wrestlers came together. And then, too, not greatly to the liking of the Anglo-Danes, it was shown that they had no monopoly of big men and good wrestlers. Men from all parts of England there were, for this wrestling at Saltersby Fair was of great repute and not confined only to them that dwelt in or were of the neighbourhood. Two men from the other side of Humber had come to compete, as well as men from Mercia and a giant Saxon from Wessex.

The tallest and biggest man ever seen at Saltersby wrestling was this last; and when he upreared his mighty bulk and stature in the ring to try a fall against one of those from Northumbria, they who formed the ring gave vent to a gasp of wonder. Equal to Harold Haardrade, the seven foot king of Norway, he was in height, and such arms, such thighs and calves none had ever beheld before.

"'Tis Goliath come to earth again," whispered Wulfrade of Hornbrook, who had something of book learning, yet insufficient to have learned that the still tongue maketh a wise head.

And as Goliath might have treated those of his day, so did the giant Saxon from Wessex deal with his first opponent. The Northumbrian was a sturdy carle and would have been accounted a stout and powerful man in any company, yet the southerner took him simply in his huge arms, lifted him from the turf as though the effort cost him nothing, and placed him flat on his back as if he had been no more than a ten-year-old boy.

At this exhibition of strength there was no cheering; the beholders were stricken mute. There was naught of chance in the fall, it was simply the exercise of a physical power beyond all believing; the succumbing of one man to another against whom it seemed vain to contend. It was scarce wrestling at all, since there was no struggle. True, for five short seconds the northern man had wriggled and strained, but his efforts had been less in effect than the kicking and writhing of a fledgling sparrow in a youthful birdnester's hands. The colossus was more than human in his might.

"Whence comes he? What is his name?" were questions that buzzed around the ring what time two more wrestlers—yet with no great heart, for they had watched the previous bout—came forth in contention.

For the most part those watching knew naught of the man; many had seen him that morning and remarked on his enormous bulk ere yet the wrestling commenced, and all they knew was that when those to compete for the ram and the ring

came forward to give in their names to Steward Aelfric, he was amongst them. But there was one man knew further; he was one of Earl Leofric's men from Bourne, and as it was near to him that Harald Ulfsson and his friends were standing when he began to give answer to the questions, the youths caught his words plainly.

"Who is he, ask you?" cried the man, a soldier by his dress. "Why, he is of Boldrewood, nigh to the town of Southampton, and he is named Edred. I have seen him oft in London."

"Thor!" ejaculated the man addressed. "But did ever one see the like to him!"

"Not in the southland," returned the soldier with a hearty oath. "And I doubt me if they grow such men in any part of England or elsewhere, for that matter."

"A mighty wrestler he is," put in Winter, who had edged nearer.

"May well say so, lad. I saw him at the Easter wrestling at Smithfield in London, which my lord Harold Godwinsson held for the diversion of King Edward; though, by the Mass! 'tis little pleasure in such men's sport that our bishop-king finds. A better for him is a shaveling priest droning forth some tale of a half-flayed saint than a——"

"But the wrestling, friend, what of it?" interrupted Harald Ulfsson. "How went it, and what did this gigantic Saxon?"

"Nay," and the soldier laughed heartily. "What he did there you shall see for yourselves, or I am greatly mistaken. He handled

men as if they had been babes. He tossed one man so far as I could reach with a Frenchman's spear, breaking his back so that he died ere he might be picked up. What did he, you say? Why, he beat every man who dared to stand up against him; and that day there were the best wrestlers in England gathered together."

"I doubt that," put in Harald hastily, but the speaker took no heed of the interruption.

"Lord Harold," he went on, "had brought him up from Wessex confident none could beat him. Nor did any beat him."

"Mayhap none tried hard enough," again broke in the contentious Northumbrian youth. "In the north it may be——"

"None cared greatly for the trying, young sir," rejoined the soldier, "after the back of Wolf was broken; they had no mind to be so served or worse, until——"

"Aye, until what?" cried Harald, who seemed to find cause for impatience in the success of the wrestler.

"Why, until Lord Harold, his man, Edred, having won the prize, offered to match him against any carle in England; he would wager his cap full of gold pieces, he said, no man lived who could give his wrestler a fall."

"Well?" half-a-dozen voices cried.

"Well; and then his brother Tostig, who sat beside the earl, and who hath no great love to him, wagered he would find such a man as was needed, and at no great distance from the ring either."

"Bravo, Tostig;" and the Northumbrian's grey eyes quickened with excitement. "And did he find the man? Did Harold wager his gold?"

"That did he. And Earl Tostig he brought his man, a huge fellow he had found in Holland, and had taken into his service; a man more like to a bull than aught else, covered with hair, and with an arm so big as my leg. 'Throw this man, Knut,' said the Earl, pointing to his brother's man. 'Fling thou him on his back, and I will fill thy helm with pennies. And if he fling thee' —you know the Earl Tostig, carles, ever a cruel and a hard man, and I care not who hears me say it, for I have no love of the Godwinssons—'then will I break thy legs and make a beggar of thee.'"

"And did the Dane fling him, master?" cried a listener, who, with the majority of the others within earshot, had turned their attention from the wrestling to the tale-teller.

"Dolt," growled the latter, "did I not say this Wessex giant threw all like children? Then how could this Hollander have flung him? Natheless, he tried, however, and he was himself a very strong man. He eyed the Lord Harold's man, and then he took off his arms and armour and went into the wrestling ring. Thor! but they were a brave-looking pair of men. But Knut, the Hollander, fared no better than had our English fellows. He rushed at the Wessex man, clipped him round the middle, and tried to lift and fall on him. Saints and devils! He might as well have tried to stir one of our forest oaks;

the Wessex man never budged. But he put his arms around Knut and just squeezed him. Lads! A tree-trunk could not have withstood that squeeze, and Knut dropped to the earth like a sack of corn."

"And could he do nothing?"

The speaker was Harald Ulfsson, the rest were dumb with wonder at the Saxon's mighty arm power.

"Who, young sir?"

"This Knut."

"Nay, now how could he do aught when his arms were pinned to his sides, and he was hoisted up so that his legs were a-dangling? He did naught but gasp and gasp until he could breathe no longer, and then he hung limp like an empty smock. And then the Saxon dropped him on the ground. By Thor! he had not flung Lord Harold's man, but there was no need for Tostig to keep his promise; Knut was safe from leg breaking, for he was stone dead."

"Ah!" and from those who had hearkened came a deep-drawn breath.

"Wherefore," pursued the soldier, "I am free to wager that Edred, Earl Harold's man, will win the wrestling here to-day, for I see none here that will trouble him."

At these words Harald turned upon the man as if he would speak, gained control of himself and kept silent, turning again to the ring.

But the wrestling, commenced with such spirit, showed plain evidence of flagging. The interest had gone from it. Wrestlers and onlookers alike,

confounded by the giant of Wessex, had scant heart for the sport. The former, enlightened by the easy defeat of the Northumbrian, saw in him one who would make all their efforts useless. How might they cope with one so godlike in his strength? There was naught for them to hope for but broken bones. And the spectators' interest was out, for the conclusion of the contest was easily perceivable. What chance had even so cunning a wrestler as Leofric the Runner against him?

Moreover, these were in no good humour, for they had looked for the winning of the prize by one whom they knew. Between Leofric and the miller they had judged the issue to lie, and they had little stomach for seeing a stranger, and a Saxon—the fenmen cared not for the pure Saxons of the mid and south lands—win the prize.

Another pair of names were called, but those who should have answered held aloof, sullen and lowering; and then one stepped forward to Aelfric the Steward.

"Of what use for us to wrestle?" he cried roughly. "Give to him the prize," and he pointed at the bulky Edred, who lay on the turf, his great limbs sprawling abroad, and on his broad face an expression of serene contentment.

The steward scowled. "What!" he cried loudly, "you will allow the prize without contest to this man? Are you all become cowards? I thought that those in these lands of my Lord Leofric were of hardier sort and greater worth. Have your hearts turned to water?"

But neither contempt nor anger could move the men. They stood sullen and sulky, in anger and shame of their own selves, but none the less strong in their decision.

"We will wrestle no more: give him the prize," they muttered.

Once again the steward called upon them, and then made direct appeal of Leofric the Runner. Since the others dared not wrestle, would he, vanquisher of Ulf, try a fall with the Saxon for the prize? And the lean man at that hesitated; then, perhaps heartened by the shouts and words of encouragement that broke out around the ring, he weakened: he would do as the steward desired. Whereat the carles cheered him the more loudly.

But he might as well have done as his fellows. The Saxon, no sooner had the pair come face to face in the ring, just took him by one arm, dragged him towards him, and with a great jerk threw him to the ground. Then he quietly rolled the fenman on to his back, for in the gripe of his huge hands Leofric found himself powerless.

Whereupon, and in silence, Aelfric declared the Wessex man the winner, and he came forward to take his prize.

But as he stretched forth his hands to the ram there sounded through the ring a loud shout, and one ran within the circle of turf-covered ground.

"Stop!"

The shouter was Harald Ulfsson, and those who turned their eyes to behold him felt a greater

amazement than e'en Edred's huge bulk and strength had evoked.

"Stop! The ram is not won yet, sir steward," shouted the lad; "for there is one here who disputes the Saxon's right to the prize."

The Wessex man swung round, and past him Aelfric's eyes sought the lad. "What mean you, young sir?" the steward asked, recognizing him. "Where is this man who disputes the prize?"

"Here."

"Who is he?"

"Myself."

And at that word there fell a great hush upon all, who could but gape at the tall figure of the lad, splendid in the glorious perfection of youthful health and strength and beauty. His tanned skin was flushed; his eyes wide and sparkling; and his nostrils quivered, as with clenched hands and tensed muscles, his broad chest heaving, he looked straight at the Wessex champion.

"Aye, even I, since there be no others, dispute his right to the prize," cried the youth, his voice rising loud and clear. "What, shall Wessex lord it over us, free men from the northland, brave Danes and Vikings' men? Shall we be shamed thus, and on our own mixen? Shall we—but no, by the hammer of Thor, there is one from the north who has no fear of this cracker of ribs and breaker of backs even if you men of the east have. We will wrestle for the ram, sir steward, and now, that is, unless this man have fear of losing the easy-won prize you would give to him."

They would have overborne him; the steward

because he knew the lad's rank and his purpose at Bourne, and that it was not meet the son of a lord should compete in a common wrestling bout like to a village churl; and also because of Harald's youth, and he wished not to see the lad's life in jeopardy, and somewhat, no doubt, for his own sake, for it would go ill with him at Lady Godiva's hands if harm came to the lad, as seemed well nigh assured. And Harald's own comrades cried out in protest, though what he did was no more than Hereward himself, had he been there, might have done. Yet for all Harald's bulk and stature, they judged him not the equal of their young master.

But the common ones of the crowd cheered the young lord to the full power of their lungs.

To steward and comrades alike the Northumbrian turned a deaf ear. Wrestle he would. What were he beaten? There was less shame in that than standing idly by to see a Saxon bear away, all but undisputed, the palm. He might be hurt. Sta! Did a brave man fear a hurt, even if it came to bone cracking? At least, if others did, not so did one in whose veins, but two generations old, ran the blood of the celebrated Viking, Olaf, surnamed the Axebearer.

Nor was the Wessex man loath, though on his wide, heavy face was a smile that he should be challenged thus by one who was of such tender age. He looked to Aelfric.

"You will be surety for me, sir," he said, "that when I have laid this young lord on his back,"—Harald's lip curled at the form of his

speech, so calmly confident—"I shall go scathless of hurt at the hands of his following?"

And "Be content of that," Harald answered for the steward. "Thou wilt come to no hurt—at other hands than mine—whate'er befall. Do thou thy best, Saxon; the best thou canst: we here are not of the Lord Tostig's breed."

Thereupon the contestants made ready for the bout.

Amid the low-spoken comments of the ring-standers—and these were in no way expressive of hope of his success, but rather that he might escape without great injury, for the hearts of all were with him—Harald prepared himself. Slipping off the cloak that hung over his left shoulder, he gave it to the protesting Winter. His broad waist-belt ornamented with gold was unbuckled, allowing his close-fitting coat or tunic of soft, fine woollen cloth dyed a dark blue to be removed by slipping over his head as does a modern night-shirt; and then his shoes came off.

Then he gripped the hand of Winter, who whispered to him, "Luck be with you," and stepped forth to meet his adversary.

Bigger men had been seen in Saltersby wrestling ring, apart from the colossal Wessex champion, yet never a man of finer build than this venturesome youth. Straight and clean built from head to foot was he, the fine and graceful lines of his figure displayed to fullest advantage beneath the unsleeved, low-necked shirt of fine silk covering his body, and the tight-fitting hose and stockings that wrapped his nether limbs. Big he was, yet

so well proportioned that one lost sense of his size in contemplation of his grace of body.

Want of extraordinary width of shoulders was more than compensated for by the extreme depth of body. His chest was full and arched, swelling above the lower ribs, so that the upper part of him bore semblance to a barrel. Thin flanked, yet with generous width of loins, his legs and thighs, though greatly muscular, showed no semblance of coarseness. Wherever his skin showed naked, the whiteness thereof was almost that of a woman's—the sure sign of a fitness and cleanness of body. Well rounded his limbs, with none of those hard knots of muscle which Ulf the miller displayed, but with a gentle swelling and rippling at the slightest movement that betokened muscles of flexibility and suppleness as well as power. Agility and activity were written in his light-footed movements. But it was the beauty of him that caught the eye rather than the obvious indications of bodily strength.

"By Odin!" breathed the soldier of Earl Leofric, who could not remove his eyes from the lad. "'Tis the living Baldur."

But beside his huge antagonist, Harald appeared but as a twelve-months-old steer beside its mighty father, and though they forgot it after, when the wrestling was at its height, the onlookers—or some of them—felt in their hearts a sadness for the gallant youth who faced his man with a frank smile that covered no semblance of fear.

Nearing the Saxon, Harald put forth his hand for a clasp of friendship, and such condescension

in the youthful lord won him a cheer. Then as the hands fell apart men grew quiet and moveless with apprehension and excitement.

For a full minute the wrestlers viewed each other; then smiling, the Wessex man opened his arms wide as if, in respect of his adversary's youth, he were offering him advantage of a hold. But Harald shook his head, and he began to move gently around, his eyes hard and watchful, his lips set closely.

By greater skill and cunning, by activity and quickness to seize advantage alone could he win—did he win at all.

Suddenly there came a cry from one in the crowd, who had scant control of himself; Harald by a rapid movement had got completely at the back of the champion, and like a flash of lightning his long arms were whipped around the Saxon's body, pinioning his left limb within their clasp. And then the youth strove to lift his man. For a moment he tugged and heaved, but the lift was beyond his strength; Edred was not to be so gathered; he stood like an earth-fast stone. So secure was he that he made no attempt to play the trick of any ordinary wrestler so gripped, and crook one leg within a limb of his holder.

Harald knew the folly of wasting strength in useless striving. Holding fast with his left arm, he disengaged his right and reaching up to the Saxon's head, pressed on the back of it with all his force. At the same time he thrust one leg between those of the champion, and crooking the

foot across an ankle front, attempted to trip the man and force him face downwards.

So unexpected and skilful the move, so rapidly was it performed, that the man was taken entirely by surprise. His firm-planted feet were moved and he tottered forward, Harald on his back, bearing down with all his strength. And skill prevailed; for his right leg hampered by the lock placed upon it, the Saxon could not bear up, and headlong he fell upon his face, the youth still holding fast to him.

But as the pair came to the ground, Harald drew clear his arm and foot; he had no mind to continue the wrestling on the ground where all the advantage of weight and strength would be with his opponent, and his own superior agility of but little use. He freed himself, and gained his feet amid a silence that quickly gave place to a roar of voices such as Saltersby Fair had never heard before. It drowned all other sounds of the merry-making, and drew to the wrestling ring scores whose attention had until then been given elsewhere.

"Aoi! Aoi! for Harald!" yelled his friends, half demented at sight of such extraordinary success.

But their yells were as nought compared with those of the few men belonging to Northumbria who were present, and the success of whose countryman lent to the lungs of each man the power, for the moment, of ten. "Harald! The Lord Harald!" they thundered till the knotted veins stood in ropes on their darkened faces.

"Never would I have believed it,' was the loud-voiced opinion of the soldier whose former knowledge of Edred had gained for him respectful attention of those within earshot. "But though the youth hath thrown him—no wrestler at Smithfield could do e'en so much—yet 'tis no fall; and the Saxon will not be so caught again. The battle is not over yet."

Nor was it; and none was quicker aware of this than the Northumbrian, who had stood apart to let his adversary rise; for as the latter scrambled to his feet, his former easy complacency replaced by anger because of the shame of his overthrowing, he made a rush like a wild bull and got his arms about the youth.

The rush Harald might with ease have avoided, but he knew the trick with which such might be met and so he stood to the shock. But he could not use his trick; the weight of the champion was overpowering, and his hand coming with great force against Harald's forehead he was half-dazed.

The breath all but driven from his body by the force of the contact, Harald was thrown to the ground, yet in falling he contrived to fall sideways, and thence rolled to his chest with Edred above him.

Pinning him with one knee, the Wessex man looked at him for a few seconds as though considering which of the many devices for turning a fallen man on his back he might use. Suddenly he dashed one hand across his eyes to remove a trickle of blood from a wound to his forehead

received in his own fall, and seizing Harald by his neck and right arm dragged his body off the ground and attempted to hurl him on his back. He failed, and then over and over the pair rolled like two struggling bears. Yet, despite his enormous strength, the Saxon could not pin his adversary's shoulders on the ground as the rules of the wrestling required. Strong, long enduring, supple as a cat and slippery as an eel, the northern youth saved himself again and again, until finally he broke loose, and with a bound regained his feet, covered with perspiration and dust, panting, but as far off being thrown as at the beginning.

Then together they came again in such fierce and well-matched contention, that the onlookers shouted themselves hoarse with excitement and approbation of their efforts which, when they again drew apart, left neither with advantage.

Such opposition as he was meeting had awakened anger in the huge Saxon; never had any man withstood him so long as had this youth; and when he made attack again it was with the increased vigour that passion lends. He seized Harald's head between both hands and strove to press him to the ground, but the youth took a grip of one of the man's colossal thighs, and with stiffened loins and thighs—wherein so much of his power lay—refused to budge.

All at once the Northumbrian wrenched himself free, seized neck and wrist, turned himself so that his hip was beneath the Saxon's middle, and with a quick and mighty twist of arms and shoulders brought the man clean off his feet, to

fly, his heels higher than his head, across his own back, to fall fairly upon the crown of his yellow head a fathom in front of his thrower's feet.

And so mighty was the stroke that all stood agape with amazement, scarce believing the plain evidence of their own eyes lying motionless on the turf before them. Never had such a fall been seen at Saltersby wrestling; though how it had been brought about not one who viewed it could have told; it was new to them; and so quickly had it been made the onlookers might not determine the fashion of it. Yet the result was plain.

Now, while his adversary lay still, half-dazed with the violence of his overthrow, and with no clear conception of what went on around him, was the moment for the youth to seize him and complete the triumph by turning the champion on his back. But he stood apart, unwilling to take such fair advantage as was offered him; nor did he renew attack until the Saxon had regained his feet, which he did in half-stupid fashion, and was once again in position of defence.

And then the Northumbrian ran at him, and once more his long white arms tightened around the Wessex man's loins, holding him fast in a veritable bear's hug; he could not lift, but his left leg was twined around the giant's right, and he turned himself round. And then, seemingly, he fell backwards, as if, spent with his own effort, he could do no more, but, life failing him, must fall. And with him fell the giant, his great arms around the youth's shoulders, crushing him. But the onlookers were deceived; together both fell,

but ere they reached the ground—and herein lay the guile of the northern wrestler's attempt—because of the still fast locking of his leg in the other's, the Saxon was drawn undermost. Flat to the earth, as one solid body, they came with a shock that might have been heard ten yards distant, and it was seen that the Saxon lay on his back, his broad shoulders from arm-edge to arm-edge touching the sod so that a knife-blade could only with difficulty have been thrust between; and on his heaving chest lay the shoulders of his conqueror.

Thus was the honour of the northern men vindicated, and Earl Harold's champion brought low in his pride; while to the good folk of Saltersby and as far thence as word of the mighty wrestling might be carried by gleemen and sword-players and singers, the itinerant amusement-mongers of the fair, was provided theme for month long discussion and tale-telling, for wondering relation in ale-houses and by cottage hearths. And men made a song of the great struggle; which song went from mouth to mouth, from here to there, and from father to son; so that years after, when a generation had arisen who knew only by name even the great ones of the land, and to whom Harald Ulfsson was no more than Beowulf or Ragnar Lodbrog, that is to say, the hero of legend, was knowledge of his defeat of Edred the Saxon as good as acquaintance with the prowess of the champions then living. By story and song was his name kept green in the memories of the people when these came to be

fused into the one nationality called English; even as was the name of Hereward Leofricsson, "England's darling," and the dreadful "Wake," who, perhaps, had been the only other man in England to have done what Harald Ulfsson did on that day of Saltersby Fair in the year 1054.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

What took place in High Street

April had given place to June, as the deeper blue of the sky, the greater warmth of the sun, and the completer covering of forest tree, wayside bush or field hedgerow gave testimony. There was dust on the road and a soft smoothness in the light air which occasionally raised it, and with which mingled the perfume of leaf, and wild flower, and dew-laden grass; the bees were humming on the wing, the birds were singing blithely, and from some unknown quarter of a coppice came the "Cuck-uck-oo!" of the harbinger of summer. 'Twas a day when the blood of youth runs warmer in its veins, when the heart is light, and the mind taken from its peculiar cares by reason of the beauty and peace around; a day such as none other country than Merrie England could provide.

Small wonder then that Harald Ulfsson, riding a stout horse along the northern road known as High Street, which was a continuation of the Fosseway, terminating at the city of Lincoln, should be singing as he rode; singing an old ballad of Norway telling of the travels of Thor

the Thunderer; how he wrestled with the ancient nurse of the king whose kingdom he came to, and who was Old Age, and drank from a mighty horn wherein the whole of the ocean was contained, and thereby caused a great and inexplicable low tide all over the world. Help singing the lad could not; there was joy and mirth behind his lips, and he had to let them forth, though, God wot, there was that in his heart which should have made him sad, and taken from him all love of song.

For Harald was in sore trouble, and for that he had taken foremost part with his friend and companion, Hereward, in that fearful outrage upon the person of the steward of Peterborough Abbey. What Hereward and his fellows did to Herluin the monk, and what befell the leader in consequence, may be read elsewhere. What concerned Harald, son of Ulf, lord of Eskdale in the north riding of Yorkshire, was conveyed to him privately, and by no less a person than the Lady Godiva herself, that he had best seek home until the trouble had blown over. Wherefore, seeing that the lady's request was but a command, and the most politic thing to do was to obey it, Harald bade farewell to Bourne and all within it, mounted his horse, took his weapons, and set out on his journey Eskdalewards.

He should have been sad, but he was not. He was light-hearted and full of song when he should, no doubt, have been miserable and fearful. For had he not laid violent hands upon a monk, a holy man, and assisted in the stripping him of

such money as he carried—moneys of the abbey, too? And to crown all, had he not lent a hand in the tumbling of Master Herluin out of his saddle into the mire, and assisted in the withholding of the steward's gentle-footed nag, whereby the good man was constrained to travel on foot, and uneasily, to Bourne, there to find Lady Godiva, and give her warning of this latest and worst mischief of her unruly son and his reprobate companions?

It was an ill deed, doubtless, and one of great seriousness; but it is certain that Harald Ulfsson saw it not as such. He was a youth, he had the love of frolic and mischief which is associated with young and active blood, and he looked upon the act whereby Herluin had suffered (and the Church insulted) as no more than a merry prank. For, as with all of his blood, he had less of that pious sympathy with, and fear of the men of, religious houses than had the pure-blooded Saxons. The holy saints, by whose bones they swore, and in whom they took pride as in more personal and mundane possessions, might be, and were, objects of veneration to the descendants of the Scandinavian and Danish settlers of Northumbria, but such veneration was not extended to every man who chose to clothe himself in a gown, gird himself with a cord, and take himself to a monastery for the rest of his days.

Therefore, sharing this opinion, which may have been right or may have been wrong, Harald saw no great harm in what he had done, heinous as it was in the eyes of the saintly lady of Bourne; and he took his way northward undisturbed. But

there were many questions in his mind, and he ceased his singing now and again to discuss them.

What would he do when his home was reached? What might be the opinion of his father on his return for such cause? Would aught befall him on the homeward journey?

The first and the last were pleasantest to dwell upon. The first opened up possibilities beyond limit. Idle away his time around the homesteading in sports and games he could not for long. He desired to go somewhere where matters of more serious import might be found. He was getting close to a man's estate; certain it was he owned a man's body; he was fitted to do a man's work, and he desired to do it.

And a man's work was abroad; his tools were the sword and shield, axe and lance; the work was fighting. And in England all was quiet and peaceful; there was none to fight. Contending parties there were, yet the tongue, and not the sword, were their weapons of contention; intrigue, and not steel, did the work. The king was feeble, the Godwinssons triumphant, and so powerful that none dared openly to raise his hand against him, though to plot in secret there might be plenty.

But out of England there was fighting to be had in plenty for such bold spirits as had a love of the game. In all western Europe, once away from England, there was material for the plying of a man's trade. A good man, a brave man, with love of hard knocks, the capacity to give

them, and no fear of aught that might happen to him, would be sure of a welcome wherever he might choose to present himself. Even if not, even though his coming might be the last thing desired, why, in the effort to prevent such man from making himself at home would be found opportunity for the exercise of his prowess as a warrior. A man who could not exist without fighting need not look very far for reason or cause to remain alive—save and except in the peaceful country of England, where the hearts of men seemed to have turned to water.

So argued Harald; and by the same token he had scant expectation of aught gratifying to his passion for adventure to happen during his ride into Eskdale.

As for the spirit in which his father would receive news of the reason for his son's return, Harald had no great fear of angry chiding. Overset a monk in the mire! Pooh! Harald could almost see the keen blue eyes light with amusement, see the grey moustached lips widen, and hear the great shout of laughter that would follow the hearing of his indiscretion. A monk made muddy! Why, Ulf the Red would throw his wide shoulders against the wooden back of his mighty chair of carved wood and laugh until the rafters above the huge oaken beams of the great hall would ring again.

And even if it were possible the parent might feel some annoyance, there was the wrestling at Saltersby Fair to tell of, the ring he had won, which was now on the little finger of his left

hand, to be shown; nay, there was no apprehension in Harald's heart that his room, rather than his company, would be welcomed at Eskdale Hall.

Thinking of these things—and it would be about the hour before noon—Harald came to where the road ran between two great woods, part of that original forest of which Sherwood and Needwood are names of portions coming down to later times. All at once he heard the crashing of branches and small wood on his left hand, a noise as if some great body were hurriedly forcing a passage. Scarcely had his eyes travelled to the dense wall of green leaves and grey trunks, when there burst into view, fifty yards further along the road, a fine buck.

Out from the timber dashed the noble-looking animal, leaped across the intervening strip of verdure, dotted with small bushes, that separated forest from road, and at the edge of the grass suddenly stumbled.

A black streak had suddenly and with incredible swiftness been drawn across the whiteness of the road, and had found lodgment in the buck. 'Twas an arrow, shot by some person in hiding at Harald's right hand; striking the buck a little in advance of the left shoulder, it had pierced to the heart.

Harald had reined in his horse. 'Twas a marvellous sight to see the great tawny-skinned beast leap into view, in full pride of vigour and activity, bound forward, and then suddenly stumble on its knees, as if the life had been at that moment

withdrawn from it. Harald had not seen the lightning-like passing of the winged messenger of death, and what had brought about the instantaneous change in the buck he could not tell. And then his eye picked out a light-coloured mark on the buck's chest. It was the feather of the arrow; and so great the force with which it had been shot the quills were actually pressing against the body of the deer. So true had been the aim that the point had missed the shoulder bone, driven between two of the rib bones, and transfixed the heart.

Making a vain effort to recover itself, the buck reached its hoofs only to fall forward again immediately. It was in the throes of death when Harald reached it. Simultaneously there broke from the edge of the forest on the left hand a huge black dog, issuing forth from the same place as the buck had appeared, while from the right-hand edge appeared a man. Both saw the figure of the young Northumbrian at the same moment.

Suddenly halting in its career, the big dog raised its head, its eyes on Harald, and its whole body becoming motionless as stone. It growled ferociously, while the short hair along the back of its neck began to rise in a bristly ridge.

Equally confident in belief that the young man was an enemy, the shooter of the buck paused in his run forward, whipped from his belt an arrow, which he fitted quickly to the short bow in his left hand, and then continued his advance to the stricken deer, but at a slower pace, his eyes warily fixed on the interrupter of his sport.

The bearing of man and dog was menacing; the appearance of the former the reverse of prepossessing. A tall, lean, ragged rascal he was, dirty and weather-tanned of face, with fierce, quick blue eyes and a grizzled, tawny beard and moustache. He wore no covering on his thick, unkempt thatch of rust-coloured hair; his legs were bare to the knees, and rude buskins of untanned hide enwrapped his feet.

But he was most plentifully and effectively armed. A dozen arrows were stuck on the left side of a broad leather belt that encircled his middle, and these were balanced by a long-bladed dagger knife with a horn handle but no sheath, while trailing by a thong fastened around his left wrist was a long staff of six feet or so and of the thickness of a slender maid's wrist. This was furnished at the lower end with a shoe of iron hammered to a blunt point.

A wiry, muscular fellow, bold and independent of bearing, he was qualified for fighting at long range, arm's length, or close grips, and gave the impression of being likely to prove no mean antagonist.

The hound, noting its master's advance, made towards Harald likewise; it stopped when the man did, twenty feet from the dead buck, and awaited orders. Together they seemed a pair of fighters a man might find some hesitation in attacking.

"Well, friend, and what now?"

The question came from Harald, who, if surprised, was not greatly disconcerted by the evidences of scant good-will of master and servant.

His eyes were upon the man, yet he contrived not to lose sight of the dog altogether; and either hand was ready for instant use of rein or sword if the unfriendly demonstrations gave indication of translation into acts.

But the deer slayer made no answer; prepared for emergency, he waited. He knew not who this intruder upon his sport might be, but the circumstances of his life tended to breed in him suspicion of all men.

"What now, I say?" exclaimed Harald again. "And why these signs of hostility? I am neither shire-reeve nor bailiff; why should'st think I mean thee harm?"

"One who lives as I do has need for care," the man replied boldly.

"'Tis not unlikely," the Northumbrian said meaningly. "Thou hast scarcely the look of an honest man."

"Wherefore? Do rags make the thief and fine clothes the honest man?" the fellow demanded.

Now this was not speech such as might have been looked for, and Harald surveyed the man with greater attention. From the elbows his arms were bare, and around the wrists were tattooed circlets of a blue colour. This in itself was sufficient almost to denote that the forester was somewhat more than a hind turned forest thief, as Harald had at first considered him; for this practice of tattooing was usually confined to men of good birth and standing, the object being the identification of the person if wounds received in battle disfigured the features

beyond recognition. Yet the Normans, contemptuous of the people they were destined to conquer, were wont to speak of this tattooing as a proof of the barbarous and uncivilized nature of the Saxons.

"Well, what want you?"

The sharp demand aroused Harald, also it awoke in him a feeling of some irritation.

"Naught of you," he answered. "I have no concern of your deerslaying; the beasts are none of mine. And you may steal all the woods hold for aught I care."

"Steal!" the man laughed harshly. "Steal!" he repeated, and he came a few steps nearer the mounted youth, dropping his bow, still holding the arrow to the string with the other hand, at arm's stretch in front of him. The great hound, ready to give aid in whatever its master might intend, also advanced.

"Steal!" cried the man for the third time. "Aye, master, I do steal, for I am an outlaw; they have put me to the horn, therefore I must steal to live. But 'tis no more than what is rightfully my own that I steal, and would you call as thief one who does that? These woods are mine, all they hold is mine, yet——"

His voice had risen to a high note of passion, but what more he would have said was cut short by a deep ringing shout from behind him, a yell wherein wonder, gladness, and savage triumph were blended. The forester swung round, Harald lifted his eyes to look along the road, and fifty yards beyond saw who it was had shouted.

On the turf at the edge of the wood, and where a glade opened from the timber upon the road, was a man mounted on a white horse. Even as Harald looked four other horsemen issued from the glade; there came another shout, and all five were riding down upon him and his companion.

"And by St. Dunstan, hither comes him who has stolen them from me."

The cry of the outlaw was almost drowned by the thundering of the oncoming men, soldiers, armed as Harald saw at once in the fashion of the Normans. The dress, too, of him who sat the white horse was not Saxon. All had drawn swords and what was their object was plain.

There are periods in life when one is not given time wherein to think, when the emergency arises so quickly and is upon one so closely that one's actions are dictated entirely by impulse, by the promptings of nature and character. There is no time to reason, to judge, to make up the mind to a definite course of action, one does what one can; one acts upon the immediate promptings of instinct. At such crises a man displays his true self; he proclaims himself to be what nature made him: a hero or a coward, clever or a fool, dependable or untrustworthy, honest or dishonest. The character with which Nature has endowed him leaps uppermost, freed from the restraints which education and training may have imposed. The true man is exposed; such as he is by birth so will he appear.

So it happened to Harald Ulfsson at this moment. He was called upon to prove himself

reckless or discreet, brave or fearful, whether a true son of England or the reverse.

He knew naught of the man with whom he had stood on the knife edge of exchange of blows save what his few wild words had conveyed; he saw that those who rode down had intent to slay this man; that they were Normans, and the man was one of his own people. He could tell naught of the right or wrong of the matter; whether he who was to be slain deserved his fate or no; but he did know that the five self-appointed slayers were aliens, strangers in his own land, robbers to whom the weak king had given lands and power such as he had no right to take from his English subjects and bestow on foreign favourites. Also it seemed not right to him that such as these should take the law into their own hands. And, perhaps, to the aid of patriotism came that feeling which has been so conspicuous a trait in most Englishmen—a sympathy for the weaker side in a fray.

Whatever was the mainspring of his action, Harald ranged himself to aid the outlaw. He drew his sword.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

A Fray and a Flight

THE man with the bow had not stayed to see what part the youth to whom he had been speaking would play in what was coming. He knew those who were bearing down on him, and he was aware of their intentions. He answered their fierce shouts by a hoarse yell as exulting as these were triumphant; and raising his arms, until hands were level with his chin, he unloosed the shaft already on the string.

True and straight it flew; the distance between was no more than thirty yards, and with such force sped the arrow—and it must be remembered the weapon was not that with which in the centuries to come the English archers were to achieve such renown, but a bow of smaller size and lesser strength—that, striking full in the uncovered face of one of the soldiers, it pierced his eye and so to the brain. With a shriek the stricken man threw up his arms, and ere a further ten yards had been covered, he dropped from the saddle.

Ere that the outlaw had snatched a second arrow from his belt and fitted it; again shaft and

cord parted company, and this time the missile buried itself in the left shoulder of the white horsed rider who led the charge. There was no time to shoot again, and dropping the bow, the Saxon took to his iron-shod staff. As he did so he shouted a command to the great hound. One leap took the brute to the edge of the road; there it crouched for a brief space, its terrible eyes glaring redly; the next instant it leaped through the air to meet, to strike upon, and to cling with sharp claws and bared, gleaming teeth, to the outside man of the three behind.

"At last, swine," cried he with the arrow in his shoulder as he swept down upon the Saxon, his sword arm uplifted.

A young-looking, beardless man he was, richly but plainly dressed, unarmoured save for a light helmet, and wearing the golden spurs of knighthood. A dark-skinned and hawk-nosed man, he was clearly a Norman; while his clothes and the trappings of his horse proved him one of some consequence.

Hurled to the ground by the horse, cleft by the rider's upraised sword, had been the Saxon had he stood his ground; but almost as the gleaming weapon was beginning its downward course the outlaw leaped aside, towards the left, striking with his iron-shod staff at his adversary. And he did not strike in vain; for the metal shoe took the Norman knight on the inside of his arm, meeting with the bone at the elbow, and so shrewd was the stroke that, though the bone did not break, it caused the sword to fall for very numbness of

the knight's fingers. Thus at the outset did the forester gain a vantage.

One of the soldiers was a dead man; a second, cursing and striking fiercely, was fighting with the black hound, and with great difficulty contriving to retain his seat against the plungings of his maddened horse; and the leader was disarmed. Yet two soldiers remained whole; and alone, the Saxon's staff had stood but a poor chance against their swords. But he had not to fight against such disadvantages; for, ere he recovered himself sufficiently to turn his weapon upon the nearer soldier, his ears caught the ringing of steel, the engagement of the blades of the second man and Harald Ulfsson.

Now this was not the first time that the Northumbrian had raised steel in anger, but never before had he done so with the intention of slaughter in his mind. He had never yet been in danger of losing his life to another; but now that he recognized himself in such possibility he acted as would have been no disgrace to a more seasoned warrior.

In this he was helped somewhat by his adversary, who, he being a trifle slow of commencement at the game, warmed his blood and quickened his wits with a blow at his face which cut a gash in his cheek. It was not a serious hurt, though it bled freely, and it left a scar that remained for so long as he lived, but it awakened Harald to livelier action. He shouted, as much with surprise and anger as with pain, and he urged his steed a pace forward. At the same moment he

rose in his stirrups, swung his sword high in the air, and with all the power of arm, shoulder, and back muscles, struck downwards at the Norman's head. His was a long sword and a heavy, greater in size and weight than that in use by the Saxons or the Frenchmen, and though the soldier tried to parry the stroke, the strength of arm and weapon was unavailing. The upraised blade was shattered by the youthful Northumbrian's mighty blow; his sword edge alighted on the soldier's helmet, cleft it asunder, and bit deeply into the skull. Without a groan or a sigh the man tumbled limply from his saddle, and his ungoverned horse, tossing its head as if frightened, leaped aside.

It was this leap that saved the life of the Saxon outlaw. Defending himself from the onslaught of the remaining soldier, he was suddenly menaced upon his defenceless side by the swordless knight. He, recovering use of his arm, had brought his horse forward, urging it against the outlaw so that he might be thrown down. In this he succeeded; the Saxon was overbalanced by the shock of the horse's shoulder, and hurled to the ground. Before he could recover himself there came a shout of "Slay him! Slay the Saxon dog!" and his other assailant leaned forward, his sword arm outstretched, to thrust him through the back.

It was at this moment the steed of the man Harald had slain plunged into him; his horse was driven aside, his aim diverted, and though struck by trampling hoofs, the Saxon scrambled to his feet an uninjured man.

"Have at thee!" shouted Harald in warning, for he would not attack an unguarded man; and he fell upon the last of the soldiers.

Their swords met, but the combat was of short duration. Stout, war-hardened soldier though the Norman was, he had not the bulk and weight of the Northumbrian; his tough muscles could not deal so strong a blow; and though he successfully parried a sweeping blow at his head, the force was so great that he overbalanced, his feet lost the stirrups and he fell to the ground.

The knight saw his last comrade fall, wrenched round his horse's head and drove in the spurs. He had taken many blows of the iron-shod staff, and, unarmed, dared no longer to continue the fight, and fled.

"Thor! Thor!" shouted the Saxon to his great hound, which having overborne its enemy, now came bounding towards its master. "Catch him!" and he pointed to the flying Norman knight.

The brute's quick intelligence grasped the meaning of the order; its strength was not yet spent. Round it swung, and with incredible swiftness sped after the fugitive.

"Thor will have him; I can wait for this," cried the outlaw hoarsely, glancing at Harald.

Before the latter could prevent him, the man plucked from his belt the dagger he carried, a heavy tool, called by the Danes, amongst whom it was a favourite weapon, a cultellum, and throwing himself on the soldier Harald had unsaddled, stabbed him twice in the throat.

"A dead enemy is a good enemy," he exclaimed fiercely; and without a pause ran after his hound.

Not fifty yards had the flying Norman time to go. At thirty the hound was level with the horse's hind legs, and for another ten the pair sped alongside; but ere the entrance to the glade from which the Normans had issued was reached the hound was in front. It leaped at the horse's throat, and the frightened creature wrenched itself aside and for an instant stood trembling. Then the hound crouched in the dust in front, with bloodshot eyes protruding, its long tail whipping the ground. With heaving flanks and bared fangs it barred the way; and despite the frantic efforts of its rider the terrified horse would not budge.

Deep went in the cruel spurs; with hand and voice the Norman tried to urge the horse forward, but it refused. It plunged and reared, it snorted with fear, but go nearer the growling, threatening hound it would not. And behind came the Saxon.

The Norman heard the sound of his running, and fear came into his heart; death was before and death was behind him—for he had, and with good reason, knowledge of the Saxon, and he shrank from his doom. He had willed the death of many a man, many had fallen to his own sword; but now that the fate had overtaken him he was terrified. Not even hatred of the man who meant slaying him could stiffen him or keep back the cry, the shriek of fear that came from his parted lips.

The cry reached Harald's ears, and the horror in it smote his heart, not yet hardened against slaying. He urged his horse forward, but if he had intention of saving the Norman he was too late. Before his eyes the last act of that sudden and unlooked-for fight beside the greenwood into which he had fallen was played; it was finished before he had gone forty yards.

He saw the maddened Norman attempt to turn his horse to the grassy strip beside the road, meaning, no doubt, to gain the forest; he heard a shout from the Saxon, and saw the hound respond with a leap that carried it upon the knight's thigh, where it clung; he heard the shriek of mortal pain and horror that followed; saw the outlaw's staff swing round and the iron shoe strike with a clang, like to the ringing of a blacksmith's hammer, upon the Norman's helmet and the man himself tumble sideways from the saddle; and then he heard the outlaw laugh as his dagger went home in the heart of the Norman knight. When he reached the group the outlaw had risen to his feet and was thrusting his weapon within his belt.

"So perish all thieves and foreigners who would rob and try to slay honest Englishmen," cried the outlaw, meeting the youth's eyes fairly.

In truth Harald was feeling somewhat of disgust at such terrible thirst for blood. To slay an enemy in fair fight was well enough, but such relentless desire for slaughter—his eyes yet saw the picture of the finishing of the man he had struck down—was against his mind. But he was

young, and he knew not to what desperate length will oppression, misery, and desire of vengeance drive men.

"Wherefore——?" he began.

But the forester cut him short, reading in his eyes the question he would ask.

"Did I kill him you would say?" he broke in. "Because he had earned killing; because all who do as yon dead Norman hound has done have earned killing; and because 'tis well there should be one man at least who hath no fear to let these foreign dogs understand they may not rob and rule Englishmen as they list without taking some risk of death. He maketh the ninth—I count not him you overturned—and three to Thor yonder, and I would to all the saints that 'twere as many score of the Frenchmen."

"What! You keep reckoning of those thou hast slain?" and Harald drew back in frank aversion.

"Aye, that do I; see, here are the notches on my staff," the outlaw replied. "And they will increase, for wheresoever I may find a Norman will I kill him."

"But wherefore?"

"Because he is a Norman," came the fierce reply.

"But to kill without cause or for the sheer love of killing is to be a murderer rather than a warrior," the lad cried. "And since you stand self confessed as so much I will e'en leave you. I have no stomach for the company of murderers, and I can even find some regret that I came to your aid just now."

"Murderer!" the outlaw's eyes flashed angrily, and he made a quick step forward, his hand outstretched as if to seize Harald's rein. "Murderer! ye say. Nay, halt there! By the hammer of Thor, I will have no man so misname me, even though Englishman he seem."

"I am willing to prove my words."

"Get you to the proving then," retorted the other. "I thought you English; it seems I have misread you, and that you are a Frenchman by favour if not by blood; and if the Frenchmen be wolves such as you are dogs."

He raised his staff as he spoke, and the hound, its eyes on Harald, its ears awaiting its master's command, began to growl.

"Were I such," and the youth, with much indifference, once more unsheathed his sword, "I had let the Normans yonder slay you."

The forester stopped, his staff dropped slowly to the ground. "Why yes," he said hesitatingly; "I was near to forgetting that. But for your help 'tis I and not these foreign swine that would now be stiffening. I crave your pardon, young sir; I were a churl to forget that I owe you at least thanks for your good help. Good! why, I would not wish for better. 'Twas a man's stroke yonder upon that Norman. I crave your pardon; but grief and hatred of these Frenchmen have come nigh to turning my brain, and I cannot hear one speak a word for them but I see in him a friend to the dogs."

"You mistake," answered Harald; "I speak not for the Frenchmen but against murder, which

seems to me the work of no brave man. But if you are in the mood, why—" he shook his sword suggestively—"I am ready."

The Saxon puzzled him; his dress notwithstanding, the man had not the speech of a hind or thrall. But whatsoever he might be, did he want fighting Harald would not disappoint him.

But the outlaw changed his mind. "Nay, we will not fight," he said. "But you called me murderer and that I am not, for I slay only those I have overcome in fair combat. And had you suffered at their hands as have I, you would do likewise."

At this point Harald would have asked of the man who and what he was, and why he bore such exceeding hate of the Frenchmen, who, thanks to the liking of the king for the country wherein he had spent his youth, had settled themselves in great numbers in England, behaving with an arrogance and assuming an authority greater than the natural owners of the soil attempted. But he had spoken no more than half-a-dozen words when a deep growling from the hound interrupted him. He ceased, and looked to the Saxon, whose attention was already attracted.

"Some one is coming," cried the forester.

And the great hound was staring fixedly along the road, its head turned northward, lying a little to one side; the hair along its back was rising, and it growled continuously.

Suddenly the outlaw threw up one arm. "I hear it," he cried; "'tis a body of horsemen, soldiers maybe. Young sir, will you stay here?

Surely I will not; there may be a Norman amongst them, and I cannot fight a score. Will you come with me? I can show you safe hiding."

Before the man had finished speaking Harald's own ears gave him evidence of the coming of a numerous force of mounted men. Did he go forward to meet them, they, when they came upon the evidences of the recent combat, would suspect his part in it; and though he had but joined in to give assistance to one man assailed by five, not knowing for or against whom he fought, that would avail him little when he was pursued and apprehended as was likely to befall him if he continued on his way.

Besides, the Saxon was awaiting an answer, and he might not delay answering.

"I will go with you," he replied.

"And I will hide you so carefully that if the friends of these dead Frenchmen were to search for a month they would ne'er come upon you. But I would you had not that great horse with you. 'Tis an awkward animal to hide, and one given to the betrayal of those who seek to remain hidden."

"Nevertheless," answered Harald, "my horse goes with us or I find hiding-place alone."

With the Saxon in front, and the black dog in the rear, Harald, leading his horse by the bridle, entered the forest, and by what may have been tracks to one familiar with the greenwood, but to himself bore no semblance to paths, gained its depths beyond all fear of being heard by any upon

the road, though actually at no great distance from it.

In and out amid the tree trunks the little party wound, disturbing birds that flew twittering with annoyance and fear from bough to bough, and rabbits that scuttled hurriedly amid the yet undecayed carpeting of the last summer's leaves. So they went until they reached a slight clearing, no more than forty feet either way, of sandy ground, covered with turf, heath and scrub, with here and there a tangled mound of prickly blackberry and rose branches and trails.

"You are the first to look upon my hiding-place," exclaimed the outlaw, turning and facing Harald at the edge of the clearing.

"Hiding-place!" echoed the lad staring around him—so little like a place of concealment was the open space of ground.

"Aye, you would scarce think so," the man said, and he smiled grimly. "Others beside you have stood here—I have watched them—and gazed about, even as you are doing now, little thinking there was a man's dwelling-place so near to their feet. But plague take your horse, master, for I have nowhere where that may be hidden."

"He will stay here," Harald answered, "fastened to a branch——"

"And suppose search be made and one comes here? A horse meaneth a rider, and in searching for him——"

"I thought you had said none had e'er found your hiding-place."

"'Tis so; but with such proof as the horse will

give they will look until they do stumble upon us."

"Then," said Harald, "I will not stay here and so bring danger upon you."

"But you shall stay," cried the Saxon. "We must hide the horse as best we may, and take chance of its being found. Fasten him to this tree, young sir;" and he indicated a huge old oak, a mere shell of a tree, for all the inside had withered and dried away, leaving a space wherein half-a-dozen grown men might have stood. "Fasten him here; and it will go ill with the Frenchman who comes upon him. And then to hide ourselves."

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

The Outlaw and his Lair

HARALD made fast the bridle-rein to the dead oak, spoke a word or two to his horse, and turned to find the outlaw standing beside a square hole in the ground which he had not before observed.

"My hiding-place," cried the latter; and he pointed to what Harald saw to be a light though tough framework of oak sticks on which were piled light sods and a tangle of blackberry.

"The lid to my box," said the outlaw merrily. "From within I may draw it over this entrance, and the man must have sharper eyes than most to see that it is what it is when I have replaced it."

One side of the square-mouthed hole was sloping, with steps rudely cut in it, and entering feet foremost, Harald scrambled down the slope to find himself on the floor of a cave. But small it was, some six feet square in extent, the sides and roof of some soft, crumbly stone, with here and there protruding lengths of dark, gnarled tree-roots. Warm and dry it was within; a fine place of hiding; partly natural, partly artificial, as was plainly evidenced by a couple of stout lengths

of timber which crossed the chamber, acting as supports to the roof.

In one corner lay a heap of dried bracken and several deer and wolf skins. An unstrung bow hung from a wooden peg; a score or more of arrows lay about; while a horn drinking-cup, hooped with silver and with silver feet, standing upon a small keg, with a much-hacked haunch of venison on a shelf above, were proof that the outlaw was provided with the wherewithal for eating and drinking.

So much had Harald noted when the outlaw slid down into the cave and stood beside him. "Ye are the first beside myself to stand within my home"—he laughed shortly. "And now, young sir, how are you named? It is well that we be better acquainted."

"Harald son of Ulf, jarl of Olafsdale by Whitby," the lad replied promptly.

"And how come you here?" was the blunt question.

"I am riding home from Bourne where I have lived for two years past."

"Bourne!" The outlaw's eyes sparkled.

"Then you will know Hereward Leofricsson?"

"At his father's house I have been living; and Hereward and I have been as brothers."

"Then you are true Englishman, and as friend of Hereward Leofricsson can have no love of the Frenchmen," the man cried and held out his hand.

"You are right," agreed Harald after the hand-gripping. "Nay, 'tis because of a Frenchman I

am leaving Bourne;" and he told the tale of the prank whereby Herluin of Peterborough had suffered.

"I had heard of it. And now while we eat and drink I will tell you of myself; why I live thus like a fox in a hole, and have so great hatred of the Frenchmen."

He set the deer meat before Harald, filled for him the drinking-horn, and took food for himself. He ate hurriedly, voraciously, and his knife was the cultellum taken from his belt.

"You called me murderer," he cried, suddenly pausing in his eating. "Had you wife and children, what name would ye give to those who took them from you by sword and fire?"

"Have you suffered thus?" the lad asked.

"Have I suffered!"

The outlaw's dark face became darker with an effusion of blood; his eyes glowed with an intense, savage fire; his very beard stiffened; his words came forth in a great shout, with a wail as of passionate grief at the termination. Springing to his feet, he began to pace fiercely to and fro the cave, and his words came out in a torrent.

"Aye, that I have, and at the hands of the accursed Frenchmen; the wolves who have sat them down in our homes; the fiends whom our poor king hath allowed to come to this country, to act as they list without leave or right as though we English were their slaves.

"Listen, and you shall know why I thus hide in holes and slay every Frenchman that comes to my hand and keep reckoning of those I slay.

Once this wood was mine; the land beyond it was mine; I lived in my own house; I had wife and three children, and people said that Osric the Franklin was a lucky man. And that was two years ago! Count you me lucky now, Harald Ulfsson? Is he a lucky man who skulks in holes and corners? on whose head a price has been set? whose life is his but for so long or so short a time as his hands may keep it? who may have no dealings with his fellows? from whom has been taken the lands he owned, the home wherein he was born and lived, and the wife and children who were dearer to him than his life? Has such an one much to boast of?"

"This you have suffered?" asked Harald.

"Aye, that have I. Two years ago there came to the manor of Ogsthorpe Sir Roux d'Assobert. The king had given it him, since the last holder had died childless and without relation or heir. Well, that may be well so; the king hath shown himself ever ready to give good English lands to these Norman friends of his, though what Sir Roux may have done in the deserving of them no man can know. But though the king gave him the manor he did not give him leave to act as though he were a ruler set up amongst us.

"There was something amiss the first day of his coming. He rode here with his son, the dog to whom my dagger did scant justice an hour ago. Half a hundred men-at-arms clad in steel he had behind his back, and he took the road as if he had been Earl Harold and no less. A poor knave with a dog beside him was standing on this road,

a hundred paces it may be from where you saw me; I was there; hunting I had been, and the thrall was a poor creature of the Ogsthorpe manor, one Gurth, who had been with me. On the farther side of the road was he standing. The road divides my land—ha! what was my land, I should say, since I am now outlaw—from the Ogsthorpe manor.

"Down come the Normans, and at sight of the thrall Sir Roux d'Assobert checks his horse. 'Ha!' he cried, and he turned to his son who rode beside him. 'This is my manor, I think;' this was to a monkish fellow behind.

"'Yes, my lord; the road is the boundary,' he cried.

"'Ha!' cried Sir Roux again, 'and what then does this knave on my land?'

"The monk put to Gurth the question. He, poor creature, knew not Sir Roux from the king of England, and was staring. But to the priest he answered that he was a hind belonging to the manor, a thrall of the late dead owner.

"'My man!' Sir Roux shouted. 'Then why does not the rogue doff? By St. Paul, but these villains need to have courtesy to their betters taught them. Come hither!'

"And Gurth, wondering, came, until he stood at the Norman's stirrup.

"And he, leaning forward, struck the thrall in the face with his steel hand so that the blood poured from him; and I, at seeing an Englishman, though but a thrall, so misused, went hot at the sight.

"'Better manners to thee, knave,' shouted Sir Roux. 'Learn who is thy master; and learn quickly, or, by the Mass! there shall be nought of thee living to which a second lesson may be given.'

"So the monk or clerk told Gurth who was his striker, and the thrall bowed humbly. But Sir Roux had not yet done with him.

"'He is my man,' he said; 'and he takes advantage of his master's absence to take my game. A warning must be given him.'

"He pointed to a hare that Gurth carried in his hand, and then he said somewhat to one of the men-at-arms behind him. And the soldier drew his sword and came to where stood the thrall, his face all bleeding, his eyes in wonder on the knights and their horses.

"'Put up thy hand,' growled the man-at-arms. I knew not what was to be done, but I watched. And presently I knew.

"'The left hand,' shouted Sir Roux.

"And then, the monk directing him, the thrall put up his left hand, still wondering. But I wondered no longer; the bared sword, the upraised arm, told me. And 'twas I who had given the hare to Gurth; the hare was mine; a gift for Gurth's attendance on me. I ran forward.

"Little was I too soon; the man-at-arms had lifted his sword when I came to them, and I held out my staff between the steel and Gurth's hand.

"'By the holy bones, who is this?' shouted Sir Roux.

"His hand went to his sword; his son turned

to his weapon; the monk reined back in wonder and alarm. I was alone, and they were fifty, but I had no fear. Why should I fear? Was not I Osric the Franklin? And had I not but come forward to save the poor hind the doom he had done naught to deserve?

"'Punish him not, sir knight,' I cried. 'The man hath done no harm; he hath not stolen.'

"Sir Roux looked to the monk. 'What says the churl?' he cried.

"Now I had spoken in Saxon, and the knight, it may be, did not understand; he spoke in Norman, whereof I have knowledge, and I did understand, and at his base name of me the blood came hotter to my face. Churl! I, Osric the Franklin! By Odin, but I could have struck him from his horse.

"And then I spoke again, and this time in the French tongue, bidding them give to Gurth no punishment since he had done no ill. Then—

"'Who art thou?' demanded Sir Roux haughtily of me. 'Who comes between me and my serf?'

"And I told him; and also how the hind had come by the carcase of the hare.

"He listened; and then: 'A churl helps those of his kind,' I heard him say.

"And at that I was at his bridle, for my anger got the hold of me. I told him who I was, and who and what I knew him to be. I have the blood of earls and sea kings in my veins; he the son of a scullion or horse-shoer. I thought he would have bidden his men-at-arms slay me, but I cared not; I was drunk with anger. Had he

been the Norman duke himself I should have spoken, though I stood one against five thousand.

"He rode off, and I was left by the roadside; but Gurth the thrall went with them—tied to a stirrup. I learned afterwards that the thumb and forefinger of his right hand were smitten off.

"I went home sour and sullen—but you are aweary of listening, young sir?"

"Nay," replied Harald, who was in truth greatly interested by this recital of a man's wrong, and less ready now to think of the outlaw as one who took life wantonly. "Go on, Master Osric; I would be glad to learn what came further. What did this Norman?"

"What did he? You shall hear in a few words. I feel loath to speak of it, though never a night passes but I tell myself again and again what he hath done, lest I forget one jot or tittle of his harming of me. This did he: he found, aye, made, occasion for quarrelling—my dogs ran over his land; they hunted his deer; I encouraged and helped broken men to his hurt, so he said; but he lied. He was fierce and he was crafty; he hated me, and he coveted the lands I held. He taunted me and urged me to mischief; he caused one of my servants, a huscarl, to be seized, and he gave me knowledge of the doom fixed for the man.

"Wulf was his name, and he was my foster-brother. The charge against him was a lying one, and I could not lie quietly by and see him tortured and slain. I collected my men and I took Wulf back to my home by force.

"'Twas for this he had been waiting. He got warrant from the king—or said he had. He came against me, and forced the alderman to aid him, since it was a matter of the king's justice—the king's justice!

"To my house he came one even, and—but, young sir, I cannot tell you; the blood comes to my eyes and I become mad with the thought of it. Enough, I escaped; but my house, my home, was in flames, and my dear ones were stabbed or burnt within it—though better that than in the power of this Norman wolf.

"And so I am outlaw, as you see; a man whom any may slay; a man who knows not at the beginning of each day but that the sunset will see him a corpse; a man who has no thought save for vengeance on the dog who hath wrought his ruin; who counts as foes every creature of Norman blood or those who favour such; who lives but to destroy such villains; and will spend his every hour in hope of doing so much. Wonder you now at my hate of Frenchmen? or that I killed those to-day as blithely as I would a brood of vipers?"

And Harald Ulfsson, his face aflame, laid his hand in the outlaw's palm, and swore that he had done no more than any man who was not a nothing could or should do in such case.

"I take back my words," he said bluntly. "And glad am I that I was there to-day to aid you."

"And that you did as a man," the other said heartily. "I would wish for no better fighter

beside me than you, though your years are no more than a lad's. To you I owe my life; some day, it may be, I may be able to requite you. Life hath but little to give me now save vengeance, yet I would not lose it until that be complete; and while Sir Roux still lives I cannot die satisfied."

"After the happenings of to-day things are like to go hard with you," suggested Harald. "The Norman, when his son's death is known to him, will give you scant peace."

Osric laughed. "Peace I have not known since the day he came hither; since my outlawing danger of death hath been as near to me every day as my own shadow. But you speak rightly. They will look for me the more closely after this. Some day the end will come."

"Then come with me to Eskdale," the Northumbrian said frankly. "My father will welcome you, beyond the law though you are; and in Northumbria Sir Roux will look for you in vain. There his vengeance could not claim you."

"Nor mine him, Harald Ulfsson," was the answer. "I give you thanks; but my place is here; and if the gods do but give me first my knee on the Norman's chest and my dagger in his throat I care not how soon after my end comes. But first of all, after we have rested here, I will set you on your road. The highway will scarcely be safe, and if seen with me 'twould go ill with you. But I know this forest—none better, and by its paths I will lead you to where you may resume your journey."

"I thank you," the lad said. "And when may we start?"

"'Twill not be wise to do so yet. Rest here until the evening and then we may venture forth."

"If those whom we heard coming when we left the road do not, coming upon the dead men, seek and come upon us in this hiding-place."

"They may come but they will never find us," rejoined the outlaw. "Others have stood in the clearing above, aye, even above my head, little knowing that he whom they sought was beneath their very feet. Never heed; if they come, they will not find us."

"As well, for then we should be saved an evil plight."

"Why, how?" demanded Osric. "Even though found we should not be lost; a single man within here might defy a score—a hundred. They could never get in to him though they found the opening."

"True; but, friend Osric," and here Harald laughed, "though none might get in, he could not get out, and so we might find it."

"Have no fear of that," replied the outlaw.

"Fear! nay, I had no thought of that," rejoined Harald; and throwing himself on his broad back, his clasped hands behind his head, he stared absently at the roof.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

Sir Robert Main-de-Fer

HARALD ULFSSON and his new-found friend were no more than a hundred yards into the forest when there came riding along the high-way a troop of horse, men-at-arms garbed and weaponed Norman fashion, and led by a burly, clean-shaved knight in full armour, save for his head. Beside the knight, and mounted on a steed none the less inferior to his in point of size and spirit, was one whose dress betokened the churchman.

Robert Main-de-Fer, lord of a great manor in the neighbourhood of Spalding, one of the chief of the well-hated Norman friends of the king, was the knight; his companion none other than Robert of Jumiéges, late outlaw, former Archbishop of Canterbury, and once more (Earl Godwin, the Norman's arch enemy, being dead) restored to kingly favour though not to his former office. Having ousted an English prelate from the highest post the kingdom could provide, he loved the English none the more for that he had afterwards lost it.

"I tell you, Sir Robert," he was saying, "these barbarians be unfit to live with."

"As you say—except as their master," chuckled

the knight. "But when the fear is in their hearts none make better workers. Each one of the villains when duly tutored with whip and dungeon will do me three times the work in a day of their fellows in Normandy."

"Aye," rejoined the dispossessed prelate; "but the dogs are so stubborn that they are like to die ere they become filled with that same fear. Now it is in my mind that——"

But the ill-treated archbishop was interrupted by an exclamation from his companion. The knight's eyes had caught a glimpse of something that lay in the road beyond, and beyond it other heaps. A sharp word of command rang out, an order was given, and straightway five soldiers left the ranks to ride forward to determine what the heaps meant.

Sir Robert Main-de-Fer had seen war. Here in England and within ride of his own manor, he lost nought for want of caution. Twice within bowshot of the castle he had builded had an arrow come from nowhere, so it seemed, and within a foot of his head. True, for that he had hanged the lawman of the village without wasting of time in trial, and death was the doom of such of his serfs as might be found abroad with arms in their hands; but that fear whereof he had spoken he had found harder to instil into the barbarous English than the men of his fatherland.

"Well?" he demanded, as a soldier came riding back.

"Five dead men, sir knight," was the answer. "Normans—and one a knight."

"Slain!" and Sir Robert let fall an oath.

Snatching his helm from a squire, he drew sword and rode forward. Presently he was standing, dismounted, by the five dead bodies.

"No work for your hands, father," he cried brutally, after a glance at the still forms, and looking around at the prelate. "Who hath done this hath done his work well. Now who in the name of the fiend can have dared this killing?"

"Not one, but several," answered a soldier; and he showed the wounds of sword and arrow as well as those of the teeth and claws of the Saxon's hound.

"A dog!" the Norman shouted; "now who goes a-fighting hereabouts with a dog to aid him? And who are these? Know any of you who these be?"

"For that I may answer;" it was the churchman who spoke. "This is the son of Sir Roux d'Assobert, the seigneur of Ogsthorpe. I was his guest but awhile agone, and thus know of yonder dead knight. Sad news for Sir Roux will this be. I would that——"

"I would that I had the slayers before me," interrupted Sir Robert, fiercely. "Sir Roux I know of old, but not his son. Where lives he?"

One told him, and a rider was dispatched forthwith with the tidings. Others, according to the knight's command, took up the bodies of the slain men to follow the messenger, and Robert of Jumiéges offered to accompany them.

"There is one whose hand may be in this," he said, as he gathered up the reins, "and that is

he from whom the king took the manor Sir Roux now holds. A desperate outlaw of whose threatened vengeance I heard Sir Roux speak."

"His name? Where lives he?"

"His name my lips cannot speak," replied the churchman. "Such barbaric sounds I may not master; but he is a Saxon. As for his dwelling——"

"Aye, where is that? A sharp lesson is needed by these dogs that they may not murder unpunished; and, by my faith, but it shall be given. Where lives this Saxon swine?"

"No man knoweth; but he has hiding somewhere, though Sir Roux hath sought in vain this many a time for him. He comes and he goes, from where or whither none knoweth; and if he may meet a Norman he slays him. Half-a-dozen hath he thus foully murdered."

"But what of his villain countrymen—know they not where he finds hiding?"

"They say not; Sir Roux——"

"Sir Roux is over tender hearted," interrupted Main-de-Fer. "A rope around the thumbs or a lopping of ears would loosen their tongues."

"They are stubborn rogues, these English."

"I have met others, but they spoke at last," laughed the knight. He turned to the waiting soldiers. "Get you down, a dozen of you," he commanded, "and search among the timber. Traces there must be. One Saxon dog never slew five Normans."

They searched for some indication of whither the slayers had gone, and while so doing, there

came along the road—to his sorrow—a little lad driving a flock of geese. A word from the knight, and he was in the rude grasp of a couple of soldiers, Sir Robert before him, and handling his riding-whip. For a few minutes there was speech between them.

Sir Robert Main-de-Fer had not boasted without cause; his prisoner was powerless, and a lad not yet half grown. When his iron hand relaxed from the lad's arm and his whip lash was again still, Gurth, the goose-herd, was in tears, and the knight smiling grimly. The lad wept for that he was born thrall of the late franklin of Ogsthorpe, and also for the curiosity that had led him into the forest one day, and there, hidden, had seen the hiding-place of his outlawed master. The knight smiled that he had learned so much and so quickly. Clearly the seigneur of Ogsthorpe had not sought in the right fashion to find the man whom his cruelty, oppression, and avarice had driven into the greenwood and made him murderer.

His strong fingers on the nape of the neck of the wretched guide, seated across his horse's withers, Main-de-Fer rode into the forest. When it suited their purpose, the well-hated Norman favourites of the saintly Edward would appeal to the law of the land which held jurisdiction over such as Osric the outlaw; when otherwise, they did not scruple to act the law themselves. In this instance, however, the object of the knight's vengeance could claim no protection from the law. An outlaw, he was free to be slain by

whosoever might choose. Yet his condition gave no warrant or authority for the forcing of the goose-herd by torture or threat of death to declare his hiding-place.

But for the killing of the Normans Robert Main-de-Fer had not troubled his head an instant with Osric the Saxon or his doings. Thought of vengeance on one who had harmed his compatriots urged him rather than any regard of the law. To him it would have mattered naught whether Osric were in law or outlaw, such was the arrogance of the Normans whom the Confessor's partiality for the race had brought into England.

Stoutly had the Earl Godwin striven against this influx of foreigners, the granting to them of lands, titles, and honours to the detriment of Englishmen. In some measure he had succeeded; and now that the great earl was dead, his son Harold, the greatest man in England, continued such policy. By hundreds had the Normans hurried into England at Edward's accession; more had followed when Duke William of Normandy paid his celebrated visit to the country in 1051: the court had become filled with them, and many found posts in the English church. Norman speech and Norman manners and Norman costume became common; French was not only the language of the court, but of the law. And everywhere the strangers were hated.

Then had come the riot at Dover, when the Count of Boulogne was driven out of the town after a great fight in consequence of an assault made by one of his men upon a townsman. It

was this which occasioned the outlawry and exile of Godwin and his family; and though when the latter ultimately triumphed, returned to England, and resumed their power, numbers of Normans fled back to their own land, a number still remained and in possession of those gifts the king had made them. Hence the presence of such as Sir Roux d'Assobert and Sir Robert Main-de-Fer.

These Normans within the sphere of their estates maintained themselves as petty tyrants. The laws notwithstanding, they arrogated to themselves the power of life and death over their serfs and even the freemen. They builded castles; and except in respect of the great Saxon landowners, openly avowed their hatred and contempt of the English among whom they lived. Each had his retinue of men-at-arms, to support whom the uttermost farthing was wrung from their unhappy dependants, whose hatred they most thoroughly earned. Like the masters of a conquered land they bore themselves rather than sojourners on sufferance; yet those who suffered by them knew not that they were but experiencing a foretaste of the fate that would descend upon the whole of the country when, in a few years' time, the fortunes of England should be changed, the Saxon dynasty overthrown, and the mastership of the land by the foreigner should be an accomplished fact from the Isle of Wight to York city.

"Guide us truly, thou whelp," the knight said to the goose-herd as the line of men wound within the trees.

The lad understood naught of the tongue wherein the words were spoken, but the fierce pressure upon his neck was assurance enough of the ill that would come to him if he failed in the work to which he had been forced.

The tears streamed down Gurth's tanned face, but they carried no appeal to the Norman. Through a soldier who spoke English he had understood what was required of him, and he had needed no words to inform him what would happen if he refused. He knew that he was about to betray his master, and the tears were as much for that as for the pain of his whip-striped legs. With trembling hand he pointed now to the right, now to the left, as direction for his captor's horse to be turned, and presently the troop gained the clearing.

"It is here," he indicated.

"Where?" demanded Main-de-Fer, staring about him where, to his eyes, no sign of place of concealment presented itself.

He thought himself tricked; and a sudden yell of pain pierced the silence of the wood as his grip, which had gained him his cognomen, tightened about the goose-herd's flesh. The lad pointed to the tangle masking the entrance to the outlaw's retreat. And aided by blows and the English-speaking man-at-arms, he at last made known to his captors the secret that Osric the outlaw had believed was known to but one other beside himself.

The dog-rose and blackberry were dragged aside, the turf-covered framework exposed, and

Robert Main-de-Fer, tumbling the miserable betrayer heedlessly from his seat, leaped to the ground to join the soldiers gathered about the pit's mouth. Meanwhile, the horse of Harald Ulfsson had been found, sufficiently establishing the fact that the presumed slayer of the Normans had had assistance.

Bitterly sobbing, Gurth had picked himself up, and, unnoticed, had stumbled through the trees to hide his shame and grief in the recesses of the wood.

Suddenly from the bowels of the pit an arrow streaked its way upward, burying half the length of its shaft in the inside of the thigh of one of those bending over the mouth. Before the yell of pain and surprise had escaped his lips there came a second, and all drew quickly backward.

"The badger is found; now to draw him," cried Sir Robert. "Get in! get in!"

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

The Badger Drawing

WITHIN the pit, his thoughts upon the story that Osric had related to him, Harald Ulfsson's ears caught the sound of the coming of the horsemen while they were yet a long distance from the clearing; the reverberations of the hoof-beats quivered through the roof of the hiding-place and disturbed him. For a few seconds he listened, then raised himself.

"Some one rides hither through the trees," he said.

"Aye; I hear them. I have heard the sound before," replied the outlaw unconcernedly. He was re-stringing his bow, and did not trouble even to look up from his work.

"There are many," the youth continued.

"One or a hundred, they will never find the entrance to our burrow."

"They will find my horse, though, and I have little liking for losing it."

"Better the horse than your life, young sir," rejoined the outlaw. "And if these be the riders along the road whom we heard, and Normans, as seems by their coming hither, they will have your

life, with or without your leave, come they to the catching of you. Bide here."

But Harald rose to his feet and pointed to the great hound, sitting on its haunches in an attitude of watchfulness, lips drawn back from its great fangs.

"Would you leave your dog to be taken by your enemy?" he asked.

"Nay, that would I not," was the quick answer. "Though for that he would be a better man than any Norman I have yet seen who would bear Bran away from me."

"Still, as you would not lose your hound neither will I lose my horse," Harald exclaimed, with determination. "Look you, I will leave here and take my chance while you——"

"'Tis madness," and Osric leaped to his feet. "You would lose your way; you would — by Thor! 'tis too late for you to do aught but stay here now."

The outlaw was right, for at that moment the dull sound they had heard increased so greatly as to indicate that the horsemen had reached the clearing. Muttering an angry exclamation, Harald looked angrily at his companion, whose eyes sought his wonderingly as both heard a sudden cry from above. Tense and expectant they stood, and then Osric shook his head.

"But they will never find us," he suddenly whispered; but for all that he hurriedly completed the fitting of his bowstring.

Then as the men-at-arms dispersed, trampling overhead, he suddenly uttered a fierce cry and

flung himself on his back at the foot of the inclined way giving admittance to the burrow, from the mouth of which they could hear the covering being hurled aside. Light streamed within, and Osric let loose an arrow. The wounded man's cry was heard, and Harald unsheathed his heavy sword. Faintly growling, the hound crept beside its master.

"We are taken like badgers," cried Harald.

"And as with the dogs who try to draw badgers, so shall some of the dogs above be bitten ere we be drawn," his companion answered savagely.

"Aye, some will get scratched," assented the youth. "But for my part I would rather we fought in the open."

"They can come to us but one at a time here."

"If they be such fools; but there are other ways of killing badgers than drawing or digging, and I would sooner be bitten to death than choked with smoke."

And then the outlet of the pit was darkened as a soldier, obedient to his leader's command, began to descend. Feet foremost he came, a shield covering his legs. Dagger in hand, the outlaw waited until he should be near enough to strike, and then a stab checked his perilous descent and slew him, his shield falling and clattering on the floor of the pit. A yell of defiance broke from the Saxon, and with it mingled the deep baying of the great hound.

"What said I?" exclaimed Harald. "We shall find it scarcely easy to get out of here."

"But they may not come to us," the outlaw replied. "St. Dunstan, but I would give much to know to whom we owe this betrayal."

"'Twould serve us little if we did. And we may find other foes to fight than Norman soldiers."

Even as Harald spoke there rolled into the pit a great bundle of blazing bracken and dead sticks. Others followed, burning and smoking, faggots were thrust down, the flames caught them, and the thick reek of the smoke filled and darkened the chamber, though in a little while there was light enough as the red tongues of flames flashed through the uprising clouds. The heat speedily became unbearable. When a badger might not be drawn or dug out then he could be smoked.

To combat this enemy the two within the pit had no means; to stay where they were meant speedy suffocation. But to die so, as a pestilent vermin destroyed by a crew of serfs, was not to the Northumbrian's mind. The spirit of his race, the men for whom death had no terrors providing it were a man's death, was in him, and could not allow him tamely to await dissolution. Death by the sword was glorious, a fate which every true Scandinavian warrior prayed might be his. To die fighting bravely was a triumphant ending to life, an honourable end from which no true Norseman or Dane would shrink, but rather welcome; and infinitely preferable to a so-called peaceful end by old age or disease. To die in the full possession and active employment of bodily strength and activity was the hope of the Sea-kings, and guaranteed to them a joyful hereafter.

And though Christianity came to displace their old worship of mythological deities, yet it did not take from them their inborn contempt of a "cow's death," or joyful acceptance of an end reached in battle. But for the retention of this spirit the English nation had never become the fighting nation that it is and ever has been; with the extinction of it the deeds that Englishmen have done would never have been performed, and their name for courage become a by-word throughout all the world.

"Pah!" exclaimed Harald, as the fire waxed hotter and the smoke thicker. "This is not to my liking, master franklin. Since we must die let it be as men. I am going hence."

And though the flames scorched and singed him he dragged at the burning faggots with his sword and cast them to the further side of the pit. Osric seconded his efforts, and quickly they cleared the sloping bank that led upwards to the open air. Smoke still rolled thickly up to the entrance, and under cover of it Harald hoped to mount unscathed to where, his feet on the green turf and room wherein to swing his weapon, he might strike one shrewd blow ere yet he should be overpowered.

Without hesitation he crouched on the incline and crawled upward. It might be there were some waiting around the pit mouth to strike at whoever might appear immediately his head uprose; but chance of that the youth accepted. He went first, as if by right, leaving Osric to follow.

Yet for all that he was not the first to gain the upper air; a long, sinewy body shot past him, a hairy flank brushed his face, and it was the outlaw's hound that took the first blow of the waiting enemy, and thereby saved Harald's life. For a sword blade fell even as the dog issued forth; it missed the animal's head, wounded it across the loins, and then dropped to the ground as the maddened brute wrenched round upon its aggressor and fixed its teeth in his thigh.

The next second Harald stood upright, enveloped in a cloud of smoke, for such stirring of the air as there was within the forest was blowing towards the entrance to the pit. No more than the time for two quick indrawings of breath was it that Harald stood thus, but sufficient to enable him to gather himself to meet the first that leaped to engage him from the soldiers waiting near. Close to the edge of the pit chance brought the Norman's right foot; a blow fell on his steel-capped head, staggering him; he overbalanced and fell into the pit mouth on the top of the emerging outlaw. And what took place between them no man can say; but even as the Northumbrian's sword clashed on the mail of the three who next assailed him, Osric bounded from out the smoke, and striking to the earth one who was about to attack him from behind, ranged himself at the youth's back.

"Death to the foreign swine!" he yelled in an ecstasy of passion. "Out! Out!"

And deep-chested, ringing and confident, as from one rejoicing greatly in the work whereto

his hands are set, came his comrade's answering shout.

"Aoi! Aoi! Aoi!" cried Harald.

Three times he gave the old Scandinavian war-shout, and with each he struck one blow. And with each blow a Norman soldier dropped dead. For Harald had his sword in both hands; shield and battle-axe being still on his horse's saddle.

"Who is this?" demanded Main-de-Fer in wonderment; but the men near to him were too amazed by those three mighty strokes to find words for reply.

Like boys who, ranging the woods for a prey becoming to their strength, find they have startled from its lair a grim-muzzled old wolf and fear its gleaming teeth, so they stood, silent and confounded.

But they were a score—less those who had fallen—against two, and their leader's tongue urged them.

"What! Ye shrink from one man!" he cried scornfully. "To him again, cowards."

And they rushed on the Englishmen, three to Harald and two to Osric, and the latter found his ragged deer-skin tunic and metal-shod staff but poor protection against the swords of the Normans. One, indeed, troubled him little, for the black hound, having done with its first man, dragged itself forward and seized the man-at-arms in the ham, being too nearly disabled to find the throat. The outlaw's staff shivered on the Norman's helmet, and, taking a wound in the breast, he leaped in and his sinewy arms took a hold that

promised to be a death-grip. Off their balance went the wrestlers and rolled across the turf.

But Harald held his own; for one who had overmastered two sword and buckler players at the fair, a bout against three Frenchmen was not too much. Journeymen in the craft of slaying as the latter were, they were made to look as mere apprentices. Get their points beyond the upright line of steel guarding Harald they could not. And his great activity saved him from any edge-stroke. They strove their hardest, but he foiled them with ease, and a grim smile curved the straight lips of the watching knight.

"Who is this?" he asked again; but none could tell him.

And because Robert Main-de-Fer, lord of the manor of Holmtoft by Spalding, hater of all things English—that he could not gather into his own hand—was a lover of a good fight, his eyes never left the splendid figure of the young Northumbrian whose face was shining with gladness and the joy of the interchanging of hard blows. Slight hope could he have of coming living out of that contest, yet in his eyes was no light of fear; he seemed as one more than well content with himself. And well he might be, for he was fighting as became one of his blood and name: no man could do more.

One of the three men-at-arms dropped and the others drew back. And then the knight, shouting an order for the securing alive of Osric, still engaged in his deadly grapple, strode forward. On his left arm was his long shield, and with it

he pushed aside the two soldiers. He meant to try for himself the strength and skill of this doughty young Englishman's arm.

"Saxon," he cried; "who are you?" halting six feet from the waiting youth.

"No Saxon, Norman, but an Englishman."

Sir Robert growled something to himself. One thing was plain to him, the youth was of no common breed. He had understood the French, and replied in the same tongue—one of the matters which he had learned at Bourne. But what was the difference between a Saxon and an Englishman the Norman knight did not know.

"You are a knight—of noble birth?" he continued.

"Better than your own, Norman," was the answer; whereat the iron-handed one winced. Gallant soldier and knight as he was, his father, five and thirty years earlier, had been no more than a common soldier in the service of Robert the Good, and the fact could not be forgotten.

"And of saucy tongue seemingly."

"But with sharper sword than tongue," Harald replied. "Get to your sword, Norman," he added impatiently; "for mine is easier to use than my tongue and my arm stiffens while we delay."

"And what are you to yonder villain?" and Sir Robert indicated the outlaw, now secured, and whose arms his men-at-arms were binding securely.

"One who will avenge him, Norman.

And then the pair fell to work. The soldiers, understanding it was their leader's humour to

match himself with the fair-curled youth, drawing apart, leaning on their weapons to watch the battle.

War-hardened soldier in the prime of life as he was, a man of great frame and heavy bulk, sheathed in complete armour and skilled in his weapons, the Norman knight showed to no advantage beside his antagonist. A half-head the taller and longer in the reach, Harald kept himself free of scath, though his was the harder part, since he had greater need for defence with his weapon. It was no more than a light helmet that covered his head, and such mail as he wore was of light pattern. Below the elbows and from mid-thigh downwards he was defenceless. Protected by his iron sheathing, the Norman should have had less need to use his sword as a defensive than an offensive weapon. But he was the slower of movement; and the agility of his youth served Harald.

That the Englishman could strike a heavy blow was quickly apparent. For a space he contented himself with guarding, and then the soldiers saw his hands, previously held opposite his breast and some twelve inches therefrom, suddenly raised; the great sword blade was lifted and Harald's arms straightened in the delivery of a blow full at the Norman's shoulder. By arm strength alone was the blow dealt, and yet his blade dashed the interposed weapon aside, the edge descending upon the knight with such force that he was beaten to his knee.

He was up again immediately, with clenched

teeth and flashing eyes; he bestirred himself, attacking so fiercely that Harald was compelled to give ground. The cheering of the men-at-arms rang through the greenwood, and this became the louder when it was seen that blood was trickling down the Englishman's forearm. Fiercer grew the delivery of the Norman's blows, and Harald altered his defence. The point of his great weapon extended straight in front of him. He kept his adversary for a few seconds seven feet distant.

It was but a feint, however; the Northumbrian was no mere player of a defensive game. Suddenly he stepped in, the sword point moved in a circle, and Main-de-Fer received a cut on the left thigh. He stepped back, and Harald, his opportunity come, heaved his sword high and charged him. The positions were changed; now it was the Norman who was compelled to defend himself; it was he who gave ground, and was so hard put to it to guard or evade the downward smashing blows that he could find no time for return thrust or slash.

Unseen by Harald, the watching retainers broke from their ground. They had no mind the Saxon should go free if he succeeded in slaying their master.

Sir Robert was in sore straits, and he realized such. He had meant to make the youth victim of his notorious strength, and, behold, he was being mastered. It was bitter reflection, but scant time was given him for such sore indulgence. Blow upon blow plied him, and each guard left

his arm the weaker. He felt it; he whose strength of hand had been cause of wonder, and to his enemies reason for regret and disaster, was being overmatched by a beardless youth—and a Saxon!

His breath was coming in gasps, his legs trembling; his clouding eyes misjudged the direction of a blow, but, luckily, chance favoured him, and it was the last six inches of Harald's blade that alighted on his helm; yet he staggered forward.

"Aoi!" shouted Harald.

He gathered his powers for a mighty stroke, shouting his war-cry as he struck, and beneath it the Norman's great bulk was dashed to the earth. His helmet split and flew asunder, and he went sideways to full length. And lucky for him that he had earlier made that wound in his overthrower's forearm. The blood had trickled from it within Harald's hands, smearing the hilt, so that his naked hands slipped round as he struck the last blow, otherwise it had been Sir Robert's corpse that had been carried to Holmtoft Castle. As it was, the sword had not alighted squarely upon his helmet. It had turned slightly at the moment of contact, and a glancing blow was the result.

Before Harald might strike again there fell on the back of his head a stroke from a battle-axe. He stumbled, received a second, tripped over Sir Robert's outstretched legs, and went down heavily on his face. Like a pack of dogs upon a stricken wolf the men-at-arms flung themselves above him, and despite his struggling and his strength he

was overpowered. His sword was wrenched from his hands, he was hurled upon his back, and a dozen points were about to bury themselves in his body when the voice of one who seemed to be of some authority bade the owners desist, to secure the Saxon and hold him alive against their master's pleasure.

"They are to be taken, not slain; our lord hath commanded it," he cried, and the swords were withdrawn.

While some secured the prisoners others went to the assistance of Sir Robert, who lay unconscious, but otherwise uninjured, where he had been felled. And the men muttered between themselves.

"The badgers are drawn," said they, "but at some trouble. The saints be praised that all Englishmen are not so difficult to kill!"

Five dead and one wounded there were, not to speak of the two grievously mauled by the outlaw's hound, through which a sword had been thrust. The Norman soldiers spoke truly.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

Berserk

With hands securely fastened behind their backs and feet tied beneath the horses' bellies, Harald Ulfsson and Osric the outlaw rode at the rear of the troop of Norman horse back through the forest to High Street, and thence towards the grim castle which Sir Roux d'Assobert had builded for his protection and the overawing of his neighbours.

The pace was but slow, for the stroke that had split the helmet of Robert Main-de-Fer had well-nigh cracked his head also. The feeling within him was as though ten thousand hammers were at work upon his skull; his shoulder was so bruised it was an agony for him to move his arm; but far beyond these physical hurts was the consciousness and the shame thereof of his overthrow at the hands of one who was little more than a boy. He, a tried and hardy warrior, a Norman knight of power and renown, had been ignominiously defeated by a boy—and a Saxon barbarian. And in front of his retainers!

Sir Robert gnashed his teeth as he rode. For the outlaw he cared naught; Sir Roux would

see that he received full payment; but the other prisoner, though it was to Sir Roux's castle they were riding, he meant to keep in his own hands. Vengeance he meant to exact upon the body of the Saxon who had injured him so grievously. Prisoner to the castle at Holmtoft he should go; and ere he bade final farewell to its grim dungeon in the foundations of the keep he should be given fair cause to rue the day when he had won advantage over his captor. There were means of making captivity bitter, so bitter that death should be welcomed as a release; and Sir Robert swore to himself that naught should be untried upon his prisoner's body that would make him long to die.

The Normans might boast of their chivalry, their superiority to the uncivilized English, their eminence in the arts and graces of existence, but such in nowise prevented a Norman, when passion was aroused, from acting with the cruelty and savagery of the most barbarous of the heathen tribes that lived around the shores of the Baltic Sea.

Riding together, with armed men on either side of them, the prisoners found opportunity for talking. That, at least, their guards could not prevent.

"For myself I care not," cried the outlaw; "but it is my sorrow that I have brought you to this doom that I knew would some day or other be mine. In part my vengeance is completed; the Norman hounds who butchered my dear ones have this day drunk from the same cup. But

it was an ill deed to have led you into my quarrels."

"Nay, what matter," Harald answered. "If 'twere written that this day I am to die, die I should whether I had met you or no. If the Norns have not decided then I shall live."

The outlaw laughed. "A wise woman, and one whose sayings have I myself proved true, told me that I should not die by the hands of man but by wild beasts, and herein I see her words made good, for what worse wild beasts are there than these Norman wolves who rend and fatten on us?"

"And I, none has told me how and when I am to die," answered Harald; "but this I pray, that it is a man's death and no cow's death that comes to me. Aye, and a man's death it shall be."

His speech changed from the common dialect of East Anglia and Mercia which he had been using, to the ruder, broader tongue of Northumbria, which there was little fear would be understood by any soldier within ear-shot who might have any knowledge of the Southland English. Side by side he and Osric were riding, Harald on his own horse, and for greater security he leaned his head to the outlaw's ear.

"Listen," he whispered rapidly. "My hands will be freed soon; there is a weapon to my hand; and then for a fighting death or freedom for us both."

"What say these swine the one to the other?" asked the soldier who rode at Osric's left hand of him on Harald's right.

"How far they are from the gallows," his comrade answered with a brutal laugh. He turned to Harald. "Being a heavy man, Saxon, I fear thy next standing-place will not long support thee. A fall awaits thee."

"How is that?" asked the first soldier, for the Northumbrian made no answer.

"Why, I have seen smaller men than this lad who have not been able to keep their footing when there was naught but air to stand on, and I fear me he will find it no more easier. For all that, Saxon"—his left hand encircled the half of Harald's neck—"hast a strong neck, maybe 'twill suffice to bear up the weight of thy great body. A rope stouter than ordinary will we need. Wilt be long in dying, Saxon, I fear."

"A longer than thou," was the answer, and with the last word the Norman dropped suddenly towards his horse's neck and fell to the ground headlong.

Even before they had ridden out of the forest Harald had begun attempt to free himself. His hands were fast behind his back, but the soldiers had not counted on the strength of the young Northumbrian's great limbs. His fingers fast gripping the ridge of the back of the saddle, he had been able to exert himself, unseen, upon the cords encircling his wrists. By holding mightily and turning out his elbows, he first loosened and then broke the bonds. Like a hammer his clenched fist fell immediately above the eye of the scoffing soldier; and if the man were alive when he reached the ground, he was

dead when his comrades had leisure to attend to him.

But that was not yet, for the Englishman was free and armed ere they scarce knew what was afoot. The long axe hanging at his saddle had not been removed, and, the soldier struck down, Harald at once drew forth the weapon. The Normans were, too, at disadvantage, since as they rode four abreast along the road, and the prisoners and their guards occupied the rearmost rank, the men in front had, of necessity, to turn ere they could engage with the freed man.

There was a shout of surprise, a trampling of hoofs as Harald, forcing his steed against that to which the outlaw was tied, drove it sideways, thus bringing himself within axe reach of the left-hand soldier. The man's hand was in act of drawing his sword, but he lived not long enough to disengage the blade, for the axe edge bit through the chain-mail protecting the side of his neck, and he fell from the saddle.

For thirty seconds there raged a wild and fierce *mêlée*. Rising in his stirrups, with both hands Harald plied his terrible axe, a long-shafted single-bladed weapon, different from the curtal axe which the Norman knights carried, and furnished with a sharp spike at the head, and a wedge-shaped, pointed knob to balance the great blade. The favourite weapon of the Danes, and a most dangerous in the hands of a powerful man, after the Conquest, and when furnished with a longer shaft, it became one of the chief arms of the English foot-soldiers.

Familiar with its use, Harald struck blow upon blow, now at the horses, now at the riders ; two of the former and three soldiers were quickly upon the ground, and the rear of the little troop, taken completely by surprise, fell into the utmost confusion. Wounds he received, but they were not dangerous, and high above the press of tossing helmets and flashing sword points rose and fell the encrimsoned axe blade.

Furiously the youth battled ; the madness of the Berserkers was seizing him ; to fight and to die fighting, the death he hoped for, was all that was in his mind ; that more might be won of his freeing he had not thought. And before his strength and fury the Norman men-at-arms gave way.

Suddenly, above the ring and clang of steel upon steel, the neighing, screaming and stamping of wounded horses, the groans and shouts of men, and the soul-stirring war-shout of the Englishman, was heard the shrill voice of the outlaw, enforced and idle spectator of the fight. It called upon Harald to take the opportunity given him of escape, the opportunity his own strength and courage had created.

And the youth heard. He had done sufficient for his honour ; to cast away his life needlessly were foolish. Back from the struggling horses and striking men he wheeled his horse, leaped over the writhing heaps upon the ground, and drove in the spurs, to thunder back along the roadway into which the troop had turned from the high-road.

Splashed with gore, his fair face high-coloured

and the battle light still flashing in his eyes, he dashed at full gallop along the trampled lane, and behind him half-a-dozen Norman soldiers. But he was not alone. His hand had clutched at the bridle of Osric's steed, wrenching the animal alongside him, the bound prisoner swaying from mane to croup.

A quarter mile or more they rode thus, and then Harald, with so deft an axe stroke that the bonds were severed without scratching the man's skin, released Osric's hands, and he was able to assume control of the reins.

"Not to-day will the wise woman's prophecy be made good, friend Osric," shouted the youth.

They gained High Street, swung northward, and through the silent greenwood the chase continued, the pursuers no longer in a bunch, but spread into a long trail. And with the pursuers rode Sir Robert Main-de-Fer himself, in such condition of temper that, ever and anon, his horse's head was flung upward in irritable resentment and objection to the sharp snatches at the bit wherein the angry knight's thoughts found expression.

Mile after mile sped under the flying feet; pursuers and pursued plied their horses with every encouragement to further speed, but in spite of all, the one could not succeed in regaining the ground lost at the commencement of the chase, nor the others in greatly increasing it. But it was plain to Harald that in speed the Norman horses were not the equals of his own. Alone, he could have gained one mile in five; as it was he was forced

to check his speed to the pace of his companion. And leave Osric he could and would not.

The empty road re-echoed to the thundering hoofs; the risen dust hung in clouds, and the sweating men gasped for a clear breath of air to freshen their streaming faces. There were few travellers, and these were passed unheeded, though not unheeding. A wayfaring monk muttered prayers as he stepped aside to the grassy verge of the road. A girl in the bloom of maidenhood turned pale, and, the first of the pursuers nearing her, ran to hide amid the trees. A tall serf with a reaping-hook in his hand, recognizing the smaller of the two leading horsemen, stood in the road gazing after them; he seemed to understand, and his hands fingered his tool longingly—he would have been glad to strike a blow for his whilom master. And he stayed there too long; for the leading Norman, making no effort to avoid him, drove straight into him and hurled him aside to the accompaniment of a stream of oaths for blocking the way.

Thus through the hot June afternoon, until an ill-chance befell Osric the Franklin. A kite, pursuing a wood pigeon overhead, struck its prey to the death, and the two birds came falling towards the ground. But as the slayer spread its wings to check the fall, a greater marauder appeared, and at sight of an eagle, the kite dropped its victim and fled screaming. Almost upon the head of Osric's horse the dead pigeon fell, and the animal, frightened, plunged, changed its legs, and a few stumbles further, came heavily to the

ground. Its fetlock was broken, and Osric, his feet still tied beneath its body, unable to free himself, fell with it helplessly.

"Hasten, hasten!" he cried feebly.

But Harald checked his horse upon the instant. Immediately he was beside the unfortunate Saxon, and was severing the cords. He drew the half-stunned man away, and lifting him, laid him on the withers of his own steed.

But before mounting himself, he ran back to the injured horse. The hurt was such that it would never gallop again, and Harald's love of a horse was so great that his heart smote him at the thought of the poor brute's lingering death by the roadside. Time was precious; the first of the pursuers was near enough to be distinguished, yet he would not forego a merciful stroke with his axe. So much he was aware the Normans would not do, and as for any English peasant who passed, he would be afraid.

The deed came nigh to his undoing, for as he reached the waiting black, the man-at-arms behind was no more than twenty yards away. 'Twas dangerous to have an enemy so close.

With his axe over his shoulder, Harald stood behind the dead horse and waited the Norman's onslaught. Grinding curses at him, the latter struck, and the blow was guarded upon the axe-head. Before the man could strike again, the steel spike terminating the head was driven into his side, and with such force he was literally pushed out of the saddle.

"A sword may be of use," cried Harald, and he took possession of the weapon.

Five seconds later, the black horse was getting into its stride again, and Osric awakening from his semi-unconsciousness.

A mile thus they travelled, though at a slower pace, for, strong as Harald's horse was, the additional weight was too great for a maintenance of its former speed. Then:

"Better save one man's life than let two die," cried Osric. "Take your arm away that I may slip down."

"I call no man friend, and then leave him at a pinch," was the answer.

"You have done enough already. And the horse can continue thus but for a little longer. Let me down."

"When Sterker fails, we will both get down!" the Northumbrian said shortly.

"We shall be overtaken."

"The worse for them that overtake us."

But the outlaw was not to be turned from his purpose. Beneath its double load he knew well enough the black horse could not long continue, and for his rescuer and himself to lose their lives when both might be saved was absurd. To Harald he gave assurance that, once in the greenwood, the pursuers might search for himself in vain. He was well enough acquainted with the forest, which abounded in hiding-places; given half-a-mile start, he could laugh at all attempts to capture him. Left to himself, Harald also had no fear of being overtaken.

And to this mind he at last brought the youth. The black horse was checked, Osric slid to the ground, and for a brief moment their two right hands met. A farewell was spoken, and, the Norman's sword in his possession, the outlaw darted into the wood, waving a final greeting as he disappeared amid the tree trunks.

That night Harald slept at Haxey in the isle of Axholme; nor did the innkeeper, of whom he demanded food and shelter, show any surprise at his blood-stained clothes and person. Whatever curiosity men felt in such matters they kept within themselves. Outlaws and broken men there were in plenty, and this was not the first traveller that had come to him fresh from a fight.

Four days later, Harald rode up to the huge timber dwelling two miles above Whitby harbour, which was the house of his father, and there received the welcome due to him from the kinsmen and huscarles that Earl Ulf, or Jarl, as he pleased to term himself, kept about him for the proper maintenance of his dignity and pleasure.

That night, when the torches were lighted in the straw-strewn hall, gleaming through the light reek from the wood and peat fire burning at either end of the great room upon the arms, the armour, and trophies of the chase that adorned the thick, almost black walls, and men sat at the long oaken tables drinking from their ale-filled, silver-footed and hooped drinking-horns, Harald related those things which had occasioned his unlooked-for return, and had befallen during his journey homeward.

In full detail he gave the relation, not with that desire to make himself appear a better man than he was, which is the trick of the boaster who seeks, by force of things, to make much of little, but in the true spirit of his Norse ancestors, who had no desire to let their light be hidden under a bushel, but, knowing themselves brave, thought it false modesty to abstain from saying so. Did a Norseman a deed of courage, he cared not to hide it. Assured of his own valour, confident in himself, he made no secret of the fact. The modesty which the Norman code of chivalry tried to inculcate was not for him. Nor was he greatly the worse for it. And, at the least, he was always willing to prove his words true.

And so Harald recited the story of his great wrestling, and the hall rafters rang to the deep cheering and horn clattering wherewith the listeners signified approval of his defeat of the Saxon champion. They laughed at the account of the monk Herluin's disaster, and applauded the fight in High Street. They acclaimed with all the vigour of their lusty lungs their chief's son for his duel with the Norman knight; and they fell into a sudden silence as he told of the finish of the fight, the capture, the ride towards the castle, and the great outburst of Berserk fury that won freedom for the youth and his comrade. And as he dealt with the fight, they leaped to their feet, and their shouts of "Scald! Scald!" wakened from their heavy slumbers the dogs sleeping against the gate beside the porter's lodge,

giving admittance to the courtyard surrounding the house.

Again and yet again the deep-throated shout rang out, and from his horn with the golden feet and hoops, Harald pledged back again those who had done him such honour.

He had left Olafsdale a boy, he had returned a man; and small blame to him if his heart swelled with pride, and his pulses throbbed with the swift-coursing blood. From a harper behind him he snatched his instrument, and with bold, free hand struck the cords, accompanying himself the while he chanted an extempore song telling of his deeds, past and to come, his hopes and his aspirations for a glorious and stirring life, of which the crown should be a death amid the battling of warriors, the ringing of swords and shields, the cleaving of axes on armour, with the shrill notes of victory-announcing horns to soothe the ears of the dying.

It was late ere Harald sought his bed that night—a straw- and heather-packed kind of shelf fixed against the wall—and drew over his tired limbs a coverlet of wolf skins; but he was feeling happy, and in a very few minutes was sound asleep. Nor did he sleep any the less comfortably for that, a hundred and twenty miles away, a Norman knight, unable to sleep by reason of his aching head, lay tossing on his bed, clenching and unclenching his iron fingers in impotent anger, and vowing by every saint and devil that one day a certain Harald Ulfsson should rue the chance that had brought him to the overthrowing as well as the outwitting of Robert Main-de-Fer.

Living at Spalding, Sir Robert had learned of the wild frolic that had driven Hereward into outlawry and Harald homeward; he had learned the identity of the youth, and he had little doubt that, his specious tale told to the king, things would fall out in accordance with his own scheme of vengeance. To have overturned a Norman monk in the mire was bad; to have made a wanton, murdering attack upon a Norman knight and his retainers was worse still. The counts against the young man were clear enough; outlawry—since he would not dare to defend himself against the charge—would follow naturally, and outlawry might be made to bring to Sir Robert—who knew naught about so wild a part of England as the Wolds or the manner of men who inhabited it—a Northumbrian manor or two which would be worth the having. It might happen. Robert of Jumiéges had been forgiven, and the knight was the prelate's very good friend. When he was well enough he would ride to London and press his suit upon the king.

CHAPTER THE NINTH

How Harald was Outlawed

To London and thence to Winchester went Sir Robert Main-de-Fer in company with Robert of Jumiéges; and there, with the crafty prelate's aid, he made interest with the king that justice for the wrong committed might be done him on the body of Harald Ulfsson, who had leagued himself with a noted outlaw, treacherously slain sundry retainers and the son of Sir Roux d'Assobert, and, when resisting lawful arrest at the hands of the preferrer of the charge, had had recourse to arms, whereby some eight or ten soldiers had lost their lives. Sir Robert humbly prayed that due punishment should fall upon the miscreant.

Related by the Norman knight, the story was one that called forth the anger of the king, ever ready to take the part of the foreigner against his own people.

"By St. Dunstan!" he vowed; "now this is a crime that deserveth the sharpest punishment. To aid one against whom he is bound by our royal authority to treat as an enemy; and beyond that to league with him in the wanton slaying of our beloved subjects, 'tis treason, my lords."

"'Twas a gallant deed," interrupted Osberne Siwardsson, son of Northumbria's earl, then at the court on matters connected with the king's interest in Scottish affairs. "Two men against a score, did ye say?" he asked of Sir Robert.

"Yes," the knight answered shortly.

"A veritable Sigurd," laughed the Northumbrian. "A grown man could do no better. Six men he overthrew with his axe; and you, Sir Robert—by chance fortune—with his sword? Give the lad to me, lord king, and let him go with me against the Scots. A good sword will be the more welcome since we know that the Scots are shrewd fighters. His blood is hot, that is all."

"Then it must be cooled for him," the king retorted sharply. "Are my subjects to be murdered because of this sinful lust of blood-shedding?"

"Were there none ready to shed blood, their own likewise, England would not be a free land for twenty-four hours," growled an East Anglian thane, with a meaning glance at Robert Mainde-Fer.

"Would'st make that excuse pardon murder?" demanded the king, ever readier weakly to argue a matter than to form an opinion and lay it down as his royal will.

"Not so; but slaying is not always murder," the Anglo-Dane answered boldly, and again he looked at the Norman.

"I agree, sire," the latter said smoothly; "and the slaying of outlaws is a worthy deed. Where-

fore I ask that I may receive the right to carry out the law."

"To ask the king's help to do that which you might not do unaided," sneered the East Anglian.

Whereat the Norman's hand went to his sword, scowls and angry words were exchanged, and voices rose high.

"The earl's son would encourage outlaws and murderers."

"A man's life is his own and he hath the right to defend it."

"Is there no justice in England?"

"Aye, but not for an Englishman against a foreigner, except that which his arm can win him."

"Two against twenty! By Odin! but I would that I had a score such."

"A score! 'Tis pity that all Englishmen are not so. Were they, England might be kept to the English."

"Pardieu! What a man cannot keep he deserves to lose."

"Give the Norman his due."

"Let them fight out the quarrel."

"Send the boy to Scotland."

"Justice! Justice! lord king."

"Since the lad is a match for ten, make him leader of a thousand—that was Canute's way."

"And a right good way too."

Each tried to shout the other down, voicing an opinion dictated by fear, feeling or interest; and

looking from one to the other, sat the king, unregarded, and fearful of the storm that had so suddenly arisen, hearing but half of the whispered words Robert of Jumiéges was pouring into his ear.

And then the voice of the Earl of Wessex made itself heard above the tumult, commanding, reproachful, conciliatory. He quieted the arguers with courtly admonishings against the want of respect they showed to the king, and secured silence.

"Justice, Sir Robert, shall be done; have no fear. Englishmen, the liberties of all are safeguarded by our laws; favour beyond his deserts no man shall have. The matter shall be inquired into. My lord Osberne, the wars would be a very proper place for this youth, and under your care he would learn discipline. If the laws have been broken then the penalty must be paid."

Thus Harold Godwinsson; and each man believing himself and his arguments upheld, the ruffled feathers were smoothed. But Robert of Jumiéges was still at the king's side.

"I am content to abide by our sovereign's will," declared Main-de-Fer. He had noted his colleague. "My claim for the death of my soldiers is a just one."

"To kill in fair fight is to a man's honour," added Osberne; "and I place confidence in our king." Harald Ulfsson dwelt within his father's earldom, and he had greater confidence in the ruler in the north than the sovereign in the south.

Wherefore it fell out that Harald Ulfsson was outlawed, not, so ran the decision of the king, for the slaying of the Norman men-at-arms, but for his sacrilegious participation in the assault upon Herluin of Peterborough. At the same time to young Siwardsson it was made known that a campaign in Scotland would be no ill thing for his man until the outlawry was set aside.

As for compensation of the aggrieved Norman knight, he was given to understand he had a right to collect what he might from any lands in Northumbria which might have been in Harald's possession, the king graciously foregoing his claim to such.

And so all were more or less satisfied, thanks to Harold Godwinsson's interference, that great noble having no desire to arouse the active enmity of the powerful duke of Normandy, being anxious not to lose the favour of the church, and willing to oblige the great house of Siward in the small matter of an adherent's life.

Osberne delayed, but Robert Main-de-Fer did not. In haste he travelled back to Lincolnshire, and with such guarantee of help from Sir Roux d'Assobert as thirty men-at-arms furnished, assembled his retainers and rode north to claim that compensation to which the royal will entitled him. All of which was a matter of time.

In the meanwhile, Harald Ulfsson remained at the oak-built, gable-roofed dwelling of his father. He fished in the river near by; he hunted with hawk and hound the wide-stretching moorland.

Sometimes he would be down at the river's mouth gazing seaward, and wondering when would come his chance for the crossing of those grey-green waters to the adventures and noble enterprises that lay beyond, and for which his heart longed.

For that fray in High Street, the combat outside the outlaw's retreat, and the axe fight in the by-road had awakened in Harald a mighty desire, a coveting of the rover's free life. He would leave his home to found another with his sword arm elsewhere. As the only son of Ulf, all the land his father held would come to him some day, but such was insufficient to satisfy the ambitions of the young man. As his Viking ancestors had been prompted to leave their country, to gather their comrades aboard their long ships, and lay the keels on foreign shores where plunder, glory, and honour were to be won, so was he urged to seek similar fortune elsewhere. As men of his blood had felt before him, as those of his race centuries later were to feel, his native country was too small for him.

He wrestled with every sturdy carle about his father's house who cared to try a fall with him, and beat them all; he met them, singly and in pairs, with sword and shield, and axe and spear, greatly to the detriment of their armour and arms, and flesh too when unexpected resistance provoked greater excitement in the game. But this was no more than boy's play, and Harald's heart hungered after the reality.

And in this he was encouraged by the huscarles

and thralls. They loved the frank-faced, hearty-voiced youth, who would talk to a turf-cutting hind as freely as to the grey-bearded warrior in whose hands was the care of the house and ordering of the numbers of servants. These fed his youthful vanity with stories of age-old enterprises; they praised him as one equal to the renewing of the great feats of Harold Hardraade; they spoke of him already as their leader; and not one of them but would have leaped from the top of White Nose into the sea could so doing have served him.

At last Ulf, his father, made him a promise. The year's harvest gathered in, the twain would fill the long ship that lay down in Whitby harbour, and would go together, to Norway, to France, Ireland, Scotland, anywhere where there was chance of gaining renown and plunder at the expense of a little over-hot blood.

And with this Harald made himself content, until one morning in July there came into the courtyard a lean, sweating, dust-covered man who made demand to see him.

"Who art thou?" demanded a servant. "My lord Harald cannot rise from his dinner to come to beggars. Get in and sit down in welcome, there is meat enough. Shalt see him after."

Whereat the beggar laid the man flat with a clip from a long staff he carried and strode into the great hall where the household were at their meal. A third the length he went, and then the way was barred.

"No further, knave," growled a shock-headed Saxon whose business it was to keep the drinking-horns filled. "Thy place is below."

He pushed on the stranger's breast, and he retaliated with his staff. In a moment there was a hubbub and the pair were grappling, the diners turning to watch the fray.

"Get down, Harald," cried Earl Ulf. "There is a knave who needs to be cautioned."

Whereat Harald left his seat to try his muscles on the truculent intruder, and he, seeing the youth's approach, cast off the hind with a great effort and ran forward.

"Osric!" shouted Harald. "What in St. Cuthbert's name brings you here, man!"

"Love of you," panted the outlaw—very little altered since Harald had first beheld him. "I have heard—I——"

His voice died away in a hoarse croak, he stumbled and fell; and Harald, seeing the man was spent, snatched from a table a horn of ale, and lifting him with one arm, held it to his lips.

The man drank greedily, every one of the company eyeing him with amazement. But ere the horn was emptied there was a fresh commotion at the entrance, and into the hall clanked a tall knight with a golden-winged helmet on his long-locked head, a shining hauberk covering his body, gold bracelets on his arms, and golden tassels to the bands encircling his legs.

To him all eyes turned save Harald's, and straight to the end where sat the master of the

house he went, and Ulf sprang haltingly—a sword in some fight or foray had partly severed the tendons behind his left knee—from his great seat of carved oak and hobbled towards him.

"Greeting, Osberne Siwardsson," he cried heartily. "A fair welcome for your first visit to this house of mine——"

"The saints forbid it shall also be the last."

Men, rising from their seats in honour of the son of their overlord, heard the croaking prayer, and wide eyes sought the speaker. And he, dropping the horn from which he had been drinking, stumbled past Harald, whose astonishment was no less than the others'.

"Earl Ulf," cried Osric. "They come; they are not far behind me. For your son's sake I have hurried with the warning that they may not take you by surprise. In two days——"

And thereupon the outlaw, to all men's minds a madman, fainted, and Harald, lifting him as a child, heedless of those who gathered about, carried him in his arms outside the hall, and there laid him down. From nigh to Spalding to Whitby he had come within two days, and he had almost slain himself in the effort.

He had seen Sir Robert Main-de-Fer's troop riding the old Roman road towards Lincoln. He had followed them, slain a man whom a slight mishap had caused to drop behind, and before killing him had learned whither they rode, and there and then determined to reach Olafsdale (Eskdale as it is now named) beforehand and give warning.

So much he told to Harald when revived, and the youth, having seen him suitably disposed, went to find his father. Him he found with Osberne Siwardsson, and the latter made known to him the reason for his coming, that is to say, what had taken place in the King's court at Winchester.

"A rare chance, lad," added Ulf well pleased; "and a better than I could have given you. The Scots—I know them well—are great fighters. Is it not so, Lord Osberne? Will get your fill of hard blows, and great honour in serving under such as Siward Biorn; and when all is finished your outlawing—the which, so I learn, the king, poor man, hath laid upon you—may be removed, and we may go a roving together as we had a mind to."

Harald's eyes glistened, the blood came flushing to his cheek, and he looked at the splendid figure of the man who had come out of his way thus to honour him. To serve under the great earl, to go a fighting, to play a man's part—by all the gods of Valhalla, 'twas a chance no man could miss.

And then he recalled Osric's message.

"I thank you, my lord," he said to Osberne, or Asbiorn, as the Danish spelling had it, speaking with that frank manliness of the Scandinavian which saw no difference or distinction—save an accidental one—between a king's son and a simple fighting man. "I thank you; but there will be fighting here quickly."

"Fighting!" echoed Ulf. Osberne looked interested.

"Aye, the messenger—the outlaw, Osric—he who fainted in hall as your guest entered—brings word of the coming of a Norman knight, Sir Robert of the Iron Hand, him who would have cut off my head. A recompense he wants for my killing of his soldiers——"

And here Osberne broke into a great laugh. "I know, I know," he cried. "Ulf Swendsson, this Norman hath king's leave to gather from your lands such as may requite him for a half-a-score dead horses and carles. I heard it in Winchester. He hath lost no time."

"Nor, by the hammer of Thor, will we either," cried Ulf joyfully. "The Norman desires gold—let him win it. Now this is better news than I have heard for five years. A sword stroke again! And to come to one's own door."

"Where I should be with you," exclaimed Harald.

"Tush, lad!" laughed Osberne. "The old cock can yet defend his own midden. Come you with me."

Three hours later Osberne Siwardsson rode from Olafsdale with Harald Ulfsson by his side, and, contriving somehow to sit a horse, Osric the outlaw with him. Westward they went through the Cleveland hills, and then northward to where Siward, nicknamed Digre or the Stout, was gathering his men for the punishment of the Scottish usurper, and at the same time to gain the richest booty ever—until then—brought from Scotland into England.

But let it be told how Robert Main-de-Fer gathered the requital for his soldiers' souls and bodies the king had given him leave to collect. To Robert, despite his boast, the Anglo-Danes of Lincolnshire had been stubborn enough against the enforcement of his seignorial rights; he found their cousins of Northumbria yet worse. A half-dozen of his eighty men-at-arms he lost ere he had led them through the wild tangle of moors, dales and bogs between York and Whitby; and it was in no forgiving or peaceful state of mind he came, guided by an unfortunate hind, to the end of a valley from where, so the prisoner said, might be seen the home of Harald Ulfsson. His men were fatigued, the horses were weary, being quite unused to such rough travelling, and as yet he had seen naught that he could lay under contribution.

The wretched guide protested that he had made no mistake, and that at Earl Ulf's house there were riches beyond all belief. And there Sir Robert arrived no more than twenty-four hours after Harald's departure. Over such wild country Osric had outstripped the horsemen.

An arrow flight from the straggling building, Sir Robert brought his men to a halt. Sir Robert had seen war, and though the aspect of the house was peaceful and his coming—he believed—unknown, his prudence bade him beware of surprise.

Hand on thigh, he sat awhile, his eyes ranging over the rows of rude timber erections that were cattle stalls and horse stables. He had not made

the journey for naught. And then there limped out of the wide entrance a man, in the prime of life, tawny bearded, low statured, yet of enormous bulk; he limped with one leg as he came forward a few steps, saw the array of armour-clad horsemen and stopped.

"Come hither, knave."

The man was well, even handsomely clad; there were bracelets on his arms, and his bearing was not that of servant. Yet so the Norman spoke to him since he was an Englishman.

Forward he came, through the courtyard, and towards the knight, who, with a couple of squires behind him, had ridden forward a score yards. "You are welcome, sir," he said frankly.

"Welcome!" The Norman's lip curled. "'Twill go ill with you am I not," he said. He blew his horn and the soldiers advanced.

A few dogs slept in the court, a maid or two showed at the great door, by the stabling a tall hind was at work with an axe. They stole wondering glances at the mailed men.

"In the name of the king I come to take a gift," cried Main-de-Fer; "the blood gelt for the murder of my servants, slain by Harald son of Ulf."

"Is it so?" the limping man said innocently. "Of a truth this is the home of Harald Ulfsson."

"And where is he?"

"He is here no longer. You desire gold?"

"Money or money's worth," growled the Norman.

He spurred his horse. And the animal leaped

forward, jerking from his feet and dragging by the thong that held him to the knight's stirrup the peasant who had served as unwilling guide, whose eyes were fixed piteously upon the lame man.

"Have you warrant to show?" this latter asked.

"Warrant? Hound! This is my warrant," thundered Main-de-Fer, and he wrenched out his sword. "Is't not enough? This is the signature: behold yonder"—he waved an arm towards the soldiers behind him—"is the writing. Would'st question it?"

"Nay, the sword is warrant enough."

"It is," was the grim comment. "Art in charge here?"

"Aye."

"Then see to it that my collecting of the blood fine is made easy. Yonder house will burn easily. Call thy servants and bid them to work."

Quietly the lame man took from his belt a cow's horn, and blew a shrill call. The answer came at once. From behind the wall of rock and sods that compassed the courtyard rose men, one to every twelve feet, each with a bow in his hand and with arrow on the string. Through an archway in the thickness of the line of byres stepped, three by three, a score and a half on either side of the road, sixty tall fellows in helm and hauberk, with axe and sword, shield and javelin. The double line overlapped the length of the Norman horse. And barring the road by which they had come, was a serried rank of mail-clad horsemen.

A gasp of astonishment broke from the knight. Then he bit his lip, the colour gone from his dark face.

"These are my servants, Norman," the lame man said in fierce mockery. "Get ye to the gathering of the blood gelt. Though, by Odin himself," the humility left the Earl of Olafsdale and a sudden gleam of angry humour sprang into his eyes, "I know not who will collect the blood gelt for thee."

For a moment the twain looked into each other's eyes, horseman and footman, scions from the same parent stock, but as different as the apple-tree from the crab; and for the first time in his life the Norman knew the meaning of fear. He was trapped. A word from the lame leader, and half his own troop would be down with their bodies stuck full of arrows; those who escaped would be slaughtered by the axes of the foot soldiers.

The knight groaned aloud. The son had flouted him; the father humbled his pride to the dust. For the second time an Englishman gave back to him his life.

With the Northumbrians to escort them, the Norman men-at-arms retraced their steps over the moors of Goathland. Some of the former marvelled that they were allowed to do so. Had Ulf slaughtered them all, their leader included, none had thought the worse of him.

As for Sir Robert, no man dared to speak a word to him on the backward journey. With eyes burning in a livid face he rode, sullen and silent,

from the departure of Ulf until nightfall, when his pent-up passion found expression in a mighty oath, sworn on the cross hilt of his sword, that the very name of Ulf, and all belonging to it, human or otherwise, should cease to exist.

CHAPTER THE TENTH

With Earl Siward's Army

Leisurely, and with many delays occasioned by indulgence in hunting, the son of the great Earl Siward made his way to where was being gathered the great army of the fighting men of Northumbria, together with the adherents and friends, the Cospatricks and the Dolfins, of the house of Crinan, the great thane of the western isles who had married Beatrix, and thus given to Scotland a king of the blood of Kenneth, the first Scottish monarch that endeavoured to make absolute the right of hereditary succession. And with him, little troubled by thought of his outlawing, and very full of what he meant to do on the bodies of the Scots, went Harald Ulfsson. Greatly in favour with Osberne and idolized hero of his young son Siward, and looking forward to those adventures whereof he had thought and longed so ardently, the young Northumbrian had never a blank nor a black day. That his career might be cut short ere it was well begun by the barbed javelin of some wild Galwegian, or the arrow of a border plunderer, was a consideration with which his imagination did not concern itself.

That he would get fighting in plenty was assured. Macbeth was too tried a warrior, too successful a general, to be likely to yield his life and crown without a struggle, the less for that he had gained it by murder. Against the savage western islanders and the invading Irish he had proved his courage when his monk-loving cousin, Duncan, was on the throne. Sweyn, brother of Canute, had been overcome by him, defeated, tricked, and his army annihilated, so that the Danes had sworn they would never return as enemies to a country where they had been so severely handled. So great had been the name the powerful thane of Angus had won when leading the armies of Duncan, that few of the rebel chiefs who had disturbed the king during his short reign had had the hardihood to stand their ground against Macbeth.

Irritated by the giving of the command of Cumberland to the king's eldest son, Malcolm, and conceiving himself better fitted to wear the crown than Duncan (as indeed he was), Macbeth had taken it by force, slaying the king in fair fight. For sixteen years he had reigned, just ruler and stern master; and so firmly settled was he that, though the wife of the dethroned monarch was daughter of Siward Biorn, the great earl had not thought it well to test his strength against Macbeth's. His utmost had been to afford protection to one of his grandsons, Malcolm of the large head.

Then had come the murder of Bancho, co-partner with Macbeth in his successful treason,

and suspected of a willingness to attempt the like again but to his own benefit. Following came the execution of every powerful noble on whom Macbeth could lay hands ; and lastly the slaughter of the wife and children of Macduff, thane of Fife, in default of the escaped husband and father.

To London went the thane, there to find Malcolm living a royal pensioner on the bounty of the Confessor-King. And for some reason or other, the latter agreed to assist the Scottish prince to regain his kingdom. Ten thousand soldiers were placed at the earl's discretion ; as many of his own fighting men as he could raise were to be added to the number ; and the command of the expedition was placed in Siward's hands.

To this gathering of an army Harald Ulfsson was journeying, recking little of what was past, much contented with the present, and with high hopes and no fears of the future.

At Alnwick lay Siward, with Malcolm, Macduff, and other countrymen of the Scottish prince who had hastened to offer their services, thanes and chiefs who hoped to find in a change of kings benefit to themselves. There, too, was Cospatrick, ancestor of the earls of March and Dunbar : a tall knight whose vassalage to Earl Siward checked the scope of his ambition ; who was to change sides again and again when Norman William placed the English crown on his own forehead and made of the noblest Englishmen vagrants and beggars ; who was to hold, and lose, and forfeit again after restitution, the northern earldom that he coveted ; and to die a broken and blind old

man, with his bared sword across his knees, and, possibly, regrets in his heart that his jealousy and discontent had prevented him from using it to the welfare of his country instead of the furtherance of his own temporary interests.

There, too, were nobles out of Cumberland, then no part of the English kingdom but a Scottish possession, lowland Scots who called themselves knights and were robbers by profession; Danes from the south-east coast who cared not a straw for murdered Duncan or Malcolm's rights, but thought much of the chance of fighting and booty to be gained. And to add to the motley gathering came chieftains out of Galloway, wild barbarians whom the English knights sneered at in private and fought in public, men who had little love of Malcolm but great hatred of Macbeth, remembering his terrible raid into Galloway ten years earlier, when he had swept the country from end to end and slain their overlord, MacGill of the Hairy Face.

To keep peace and order amongst men of different nationalities and with such diverse interests, when all were eager, blood was hot and weapons always at hand, was more than mortal man could do. The Scots had no great liking for the English; the Galloway men hated both; quarrels were of daily occurrence; and none but such a leader as Siward could have retained even the semblance of unity during the long period of inaction before the army was ready to begin its advance.

Into one of these frequent quarrels was Harald

Ulfsson drawn, not greatly against his will, for in such circumstances as he was placed, to evade the issue would have been equivalent to an acknowledgment of cowardice.

Wild, fierce ruffians were the men from Galloway, with all the ferocity and savagery of the ancient Picts, from whom they were descended, but scantly subdued. Like hornets they were: hurt one, and the rest would take up his quarrel. Like wolves, too, they were: eager of blood, filled with a savage valour and heedless of death could they but win the life of an adversary before dying. Quick to anger, recognizing no law save that of force, they had no understanding of any courteous or honourable principles.

By a brother's son of the dead MacGill were these folk commanded, an authority maintained by force; beneath him each sept or tribe owned the rule of a chieftain. But there were not between them those complete clan divisions such as existed in the Scottish Highlands.

It was with one of these lesser leaders that Harald Ulfsson fell to blows.

Presented to Earl Siward by his son, Harald had been received with kindness. Little recked the Danish commander that his recruit was outlaw, his worth as a fighting man was indicated to the old earl's eyes. And that same evening when, the meal ended, a harp was handed to the youth and he was bidden to sing, if he owned such accomplishment, and he did so, giving account of the wrestling match, the fighting in the forest and the discomfiture of the Norman knight—for the

English saw no vanity in this recital by a man of his great deeds—the acclamations of the earl were proof sufficient of the spirit wherein he listened.

His heart warmed to the high-hearted, courageous youth, of the same northern blood as himself, whose frank avowal of his punishment showed how lightly he regarded it, and to Harald he made gift of his own drinking-horn and a fine cloak of scarlet cloth. It was the latter which attracted the fancy of the Galwegian chieftain.

Wearing the cloak next day, Harald was about to leave the wide-stretching camp with hawk on wrist for a morning's sport on the high ground above Alnwick. It was at the extreme edge the Galwegians lay, and the youth passed by where the rude warriors reclined upon the ground, some asleep, some eating, and others cleaning their weapons or repairing their shields of wickerwork covered with untanned hides. Half-naked men, of huge bulk and stature, their eyes travelled after the young Northumbrian's gallant figure, glistening with envy of his clothes, weapons, and, above all, of the fine cloak. They shouted the one to the other; but of their barbarous tongue Harald could understand but a word here and there. Such as he did caused him to take heed. Those around him were men who recognized but one deterrent to pillage and slaughter, and, to do them justice, seldom feared the risk. That he was of the army to which they belonged would not keep them from killing him could they do so, and did they so desire.

His hand on the bridle, Harald walked beside

his horse. He had been walking when he reached the Galwegians' encampment; to mount, having heard envious words as he passed by them, would be, he considered, to acknowledge a fear of the speakers. But he walked at the black's right side, thus leaving his own right hand free for hasty snatching at his sword hilt.

Suddenly there came a movement of eyes to the rear of the Northumbrian; it was as if the owners had caught glimpse of somewhat of interest. Harald turned his head, but he was late; as he moved there came a violent jerk and he was all but overthrown backwards.

A great shout of laughter rang out, the lounging Galwegians shouted merrily, and Harald was sensible as he went back of a violent tugging across his bare throat. A Galwegian coming stealthily behind him had seized the skirt of the cloak and attempted to drag it off him. The gaudy colour and fine quality of the garment were temptations the man was unable to resist.

Steadying himself and swinging round, Harald found himself looking into the bearded face of a huge giant, a red-haired Galwegian, from beneath whose matted thatch glittered eyes shining with cupidity, stupid mirth, and natural ferocity. His rank of chieftain—and such he was, though clad no differently from any one of the others—was indicated by a feather stuck in his long hair.

His hand still gripped the cloak's edge; the fastening had not given way, and as Harald's eyes met his, he gave another wrench, laughing and talking together.

The next instant the laugh changed to a yell. Striking with all his force, Harald beat upon his wrist with his clenched fist, and his hard knuckles almost numbed the man's arm. Releasing his grip, the Galwegian leaped backwards.

"Stand to it, Red Ferchar," yelled the onlookers in their own tongue; and they came out of their easeful attitudes and relinquished their occupations in expectation of what was to come.

For this Harald showed no slowness of preparation. The attempted despoiling, the blow given in payment, were prelude to fight or humiliation. And for the latter Harald was not the man.

Dragging at the bridle so that his horse stood across the track, thus guarding his back, Harald drew forth his long sword. Nor was he too precipitate. The light javelin Red Ferchar held in his left hand was suddenly launched at his breast. It was on its way as Harald's sword came out, and the movement continued, the keen-edged blade met the spear shaft as the point reached to within a foot of the youth. Little power was there in the motion, yet the tough wood was cut asunder.

Dropping the useless shaft, the Galwegian drew his sword, a huge, clumsy weapon of great weight, and of a length equal to that of his antagonist. With a terrible shout he rushed forward, hewing at Harald with a succession of tremendous strokes so quickly delivered the eye could scarce follow the separate movements of the blade.

With firmly planted feet Harald guarded the downpour of blows. So fast came they he had no time wherein to strike in return. But he was a cunning fighter, and he knew that could he offer successful defence for a short time, the advantage would be his, since no man could help but be exhausted by so violent an onslaught.

A giant was Ferchar; even to this day are the men of Galloway distinguished throughout all Europe for a bigness of frame, a stature, and a bodily power that may not be matched except in the north-western counties of England. His arms were bare from the shoulders and his lower limbs from almost mid-thigh. A half-head he stood above the Northumbrian, and in bulk less by but little than the Wessex man against whom Harald had risked death in the wrestling ring. Of bull-like strength he was; and on his strength he depended. And as by skill and craft the youth had worsted the Saxon, so was he like to overcome the wild Scot. And in addition he was the more calm. The Scandinavian blood, hot though it become, leads not a man astray as does that of the Celt. Fighting his fiercest, Harald was never blinded to those advantages which chance and opportunity offer during contention. Though in this combat he seemed the weaker man, yet in truth was he the stronger.

Proof stood his foeman against the iron shower, and wondering and breathless, Ferchar the Scot staggered backward. Never yet had he failed to break through any man's defence, and the youth's might of arm amazed him. And

no less his comrades, from whom arose hoarse, high-pitched cries and exclamations. Many were on their feet now, and all looked to Harald as though scarce able to understand he should be yet alive.

"Is he iron, O Ferchar?" cried one.

But Ferchar had not time to reply. For Harald was not loath to follow his advantage, though thereby leaving his back fenceless. He leaped forward, striking quickly at Ferchar's head, both hands to his sword hilt.

The guard was strong enough to save the man's head, but the sword was dashed aside and the wielder himself hurled back a pace. Before his defence was retaken, the Northumbrian's weapon again fell, the edge alighted obliquely upon Ferchar's bare left thigh, and so shrewd was the blow that the chieftain fell to the ground helpless.

Before the astounded Galwegians had recovered from their surprise, Harald vaulted upon his horse and urged it back towards the main encampment. Past the hurrying knots of angry, shouting men he went. Two javelins sped past his breast harmless, another dropped, ringing, from his helmet, and a fourth cut the flesh of his neck. Three men, casting themselves in the middle of the rude track, were sent abroad by the great chest of the galloping horse; and one man risked death and won it beneath Harald's sword. But without further hurt the Northumbrian was clear of the Scots and found his way to where was the shelter shared by Osric the Franklin and himself.

"A reddened sword, blood on your mail!

Have you found King Macbeth and his wild Scots already?" asked one as he rode down, and the man laughed.

"Wild Scots, though not Macbeth," was the answer. "The Galwegians lack a man or two."

"Ha! What then?"

The speaker was a knight with whom Harald had some acquaintance; Ralph the Fowler he called himself, and he had come into the camp a seeker after enrolment, as had the youth. A slight service done Harald by him had made the twain known.

"What then?" replied Harald. "Why, since he could not have my red cloak—to match the colour of his beard perhaps—Red Ferchar has chanced to lose a leg."

"And his villeins?"

"Thought to slay me. Doubtless a wounded Scot is worth a dead Englishman;" and Harald continued on his way.

Afterwards it came to him that the word "villeins," to denote the followers of Ferchar the Red, was a strange term from the lips of an English knight. But this was not until long after.

Harald Ulfsson was wrong. It was not for a wounded leader that the Galloway Scots were angry against him. That afternoon Red Ferchar died of his wound, and he to whom the chieftainship fell had been no true man—nor would his tribesmen have suffered his holding of the title—had he not declared the blood feud against

Harald Ulfsson and any who might aid or follow him.

That night two men sought the encampment of the Galwegians, and through one the other held long converse with the dead Ferchar's successor. And at the end, when the savage westerner had understood what was asked of him, he laughed. To be paid to do that to which he was pledged in honour, and would do as a matter of course, was reason for mirth.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

How Harald went Wildfowling

By September the gathering of the army was completed, and Siward marched north. Over the flank of the Cheviot Hills pushed the army, to whose numbers each day added. From Scotland came in messengers, and all bore tidings that strengthened the hopes in Malcolm's heart. The cruelty and tyranny of the usurper knew no bounds. The justice wherewith he had governed the country and procured himself the support of the humbler folks was no more; fierce and suspicious of all, aware of the efforts of his nephew, he bent all his power towards the apprehending or slaying of all who he believed would, when the struggle for the kingdom drew closer, array themselves against him. Blood was flowing like water; and those who had been the king's staunchest supporters were prepared to leave him if the prince's attempt to gain his dead father's crown promised success. Deserted by his adherents in the other parts of the country, it was from the wild Highlanders and the barbarous clans of the western islands that the usurper was seeking to gather the army to fight for his kingdom.

In this march from Northumbria into Scotland —of which the southern boundary was then, not the Cheviot Hills, but the Wall of Antonine, between the Firths of Clyde and Forth, though Scottish kings had authority of a kind over Strathclyde, the Lothians and Cumberland and Westmorland—Harald played his part as did others of the army. Of discipline there was, of necessity, but little. Men left the host for purposes of their own, rejoining it when they pleased. And on what errand they went few asked. Sometimes they returned not at all. Long halts were frequently made for the obtaining of provisions; thus ere Scotland was reached many weeks had expired.

Of fighting none had taken place; it was further north that Macbeth meant to make his fight, and in consequence the ardour of Harald Ulfsson to distinguish himself received no opportunity for employment. But that was to come he promised himself; meanwhile there was much to engage his attention.

The vengeance of the Galloway men did not sleep. Thrice did they seek requital for Red Ferchar's death, and the strength, courage and vigilance of the Northumbrian foiled them. To him Osric was as another eye and a third hand. To Harald the outlaw owed his life, and the fact was not forgotten.

Passage through a forest gave to the treacherous Scots their first opportunity. Finding their own path, Harald and Osric were set upon by four sword-armed tribesmen in a narrow glade, two

behind and two before. By those four skin-clad fighters, the sept of Red Ferchar's successor was the fewer ere the Englishmen came through the forest.

One night when Harald, Osric, and Ralph the Fowler had lain down beside their horses, wrapped in their cloaks, occurred the second attempt. The last, who, since the quarrel with the Galwegians, had discovered a great fondness for the Northumbrian and was now his close companion, had risen owing to the straying of his horse, and Osric, also aroused, remained awake. Later Harald was awakened also by the sounds of a fierce struggle beside him. Springing to his feet, he discovered the Saxon with his knee on the back of their friend. Before he could interpose, Osric's long dagger found the man's heart.

"By Thor!" cried Harald. "What is this? Hast slain our friend!" and in his surprise and wrath he wrenched so fiercely at Osric's shoulder, the man fell upon his back.

"He is no Norman that you should murder him."

"Norman or not, but his dagger would have been at your throat," replied Osric. "He thought me asleep, but I was not. He came back and laid himself down, and in a while I saw him rise, dagger in hand, and creep toward you."

In great amazement, they turned the corpse face upwards, but though the body was enwrapped in the Fowler's long cloak and there were shoes upon the feet, the face was that of a Galloway man. And within the cloak were also a Galloway man's rags.

In horror and wonder the two looked from the body into each other's faces. In the pale moonlight that of Osric was sickly with fear, and Harald felt the blood ebb back to his heart.

"'Tis enchantment," muttered Osric. "As Ralph he went away, as a Scot hath he come back;" and he shuddered.

"By the holy saints, how can a man be one thing alive and another dead?"

"We are enchanted. What next may he become?" And Osric looked at the dead man with a fearful curiosity that he might change before his eyes to some horrible shape of creature, neither man nor beast, such as dwelt in superstition.

Even Harald's heart quailed at the thoughts which rose to him. Christian he was, but the traditions, the belief in the supernatural, the conviction that there existed evil spirits, demons, and enchanters who possessed a certain power over these, and did cause them to assume such forms as might be desired, such as had been part and parcel of the lives of his ancestors, still dwelt within him. That dead men sometimes walked and wehrwolves lived, and that the only means of killing a ghost was to cut off its head and lay it beside its knee he certainly believed, and to him it seemed quite possible that what he had wondered should actually be.

But their surprise at the supposed transformation was as naught to that which filled them when, at the break of day—which found them very wide awake—there came up to them no less a person

than Ralph the Fowler himself. Their eyes all but started from their heads; and, convinced that he had most certainly to do with a ghost, Harald was about to apply the test of the location of the ghost's head, when a hearty outburst from Ralph stayed his hand. He had never heard that a ghost laughed.

"What now?" exclaimed the Fowler.

"You!" gasped Harald. Osric was beyond all words.

"And wherefore not?" was the demand. "You look as if you deemed me a ghost."

Which was precisely the fact.

"I killed you," Osric cried.

"Me!" It was Ralph the Fowler's turn to look surprised. "And when?"

"In the night," replied the Northumbrian.

"Art dreaming, man—or the ale was too strong last night."

"And then we found you changed into a Scot," added Osric.

"A Scot!" echoed Ralph, and then he laughed the more.

"Nay, no Scot am I," he went on, to Harald, for Osric had rushed off to where they had laid the body of the would-be murderer to assure himself that it had not come back to life again, and in the guise he believed it had previously worn. "Nay. I have done naught deserving of that; but some villain Scot hath made free of my cloak and shoes. I would I had him now to hand."

Harald's eyes went to the other's feet which he

saw to be shoeless, and a light began to break on him.

"They were stolen?" he asked.

"Ay, by St. Denis, they were. In the night I wakened, thinking I heard the cry of a wild goose from yonder marsh that lies beside where are the Galwegians camped; so I went thither. For I tell you, where there are the wild fowl there also is to be found diversion. I stripped, and swam within one of the water channels that I might be sure, thinking that to-day you and I would have good sport together. The fowl were there truly, but shoe and cloak were not when I returned."

"There then is the reason," cried Harald, and he gave to his friend knowledge to what had passed in his absence.

Ralph listened, and he saw his garments. "I understand," said he. "I bade you beware, Harald, of these wild men. Said I aught more than was needed?"

"I will take better guard," was the answer.

"'Twould be well; and now to the fowling if you have the mind," said Ralph.

A great space did the marsh cover; acre beyond acre it spread, a fair colour enough beneath the late September sun; a wide expanse of bog and morass and waterlogged land with here and there opening through its narrow channels where the water flowed, sluggish and brown. Silent it was save for the reeds whispering together as the breeze stirred them, and now and again the harsh cry of the many wild fowl that gathered there.

Here and there amid the treacherous green slime of the bog arose little hillocks where waved coarse grass tufts, stepping-places for those of light foot and careful balance who essayed to reach the channels. To slip from these when crossing meant a horrible and lingering death in the clinging ooze. Lower and lower the victim would be drawn, powerless to release himself, until he sank to the point where slow suffocation commenced.

No trees or bushes were there, but like pretty jewels in an unworthy setting gleamed the pale flowers of the marshland plants, the bells of the crossed-leaved heath, the blue trumpets of the felwort, and the tiny pyramids of the bog-orchis. Wide belts of reeds fringed the waterways wherein floated brown flags and trails of dead bog-bean.

No unwary traveller on such ground was Harald. During his residence at Bourne he had become as expert in threading his way amid the pitfalls as any fen man ; there were also bogs near to his own home that he had learned to cross ; and with some wonder his companion beheld him taking the lead instead of being content to follow.

Across the marsh to where lay a boat they went. Each bore a bow and arrow, and in addition Harald carried a light spear. To his back was strapped a long pole, to be used in the moving of the boat.

At times, singly and in groups, there would arise the quarry they were seeking; flapping

heavily and shrieking in anger at disturbance, but with little fear. Few visited the marsh, cover was plentiful, and the birds had learned no suspicion of mankind.

Crouched in the stern of the fragile boat lay Ralph the Fowler, arrow on string, the while Harald drove the craft through the oily water with quiet yet powerful strokes. Almost hidden were they by the long reeds, and though a few birds rose on either hand, their flight did not serve to alarm the rest. Presently the Northumbrian's keen eyes detected that which they sought—a group of a dozen or more duck gathered upon a muddy spot running into a wide opening which the waterway entered. Yard by yard he took the boat nearer the unsuspecting birds, the pole being withdrawn and thrust into the water so noiselessly that one concealed behind the reed belt would have been unaware of its passage.

So they glided to within forty yards of the spot where stood the quacking booty they had hope of gaining. Then Harald, leaving the pole sticking in the muddy botton, betook himself to his bow.

The twang of the returning string sang softly through the still air, and noiselessly a feathered death-shaft sped towards its mark. Straight and true it flew and buried itself in the carcase of one of the outside ducks, transfixing it from pinion to pinion.

Not for naught had Ralph the Fowler acquired the name he bore. Of a great skill, a great

cunning, and sure in his work must be the man who would be a successful wild fowler; and because of these qualities, which assist in the killing of men as well as the shooting of ducks, had Ralph been chosen by his master, Sir Robert Main-de-Fer, to go into Scotland for the performance, in part, of that vengeance to which the Norman had sworn his oath. Once already, however, had the man failed; this time he was assured he would not.

And as unsuspecting as were the ducks of himself was Harald Ulfsson of his companion.

Easily had the latter won his frank comradeship; he had no reason to suspect. An older man than Harald would have been equally deceived. That the Norman knight's anger against him should reach into Scotland was beyond his thought. To speak truth, he never had thought of his enemy at all.

No cry did the stricken duck give; of a sudden it tumbled on its back and lay quite still; and if its strange behaviour came within the vision of its hungry companions the significance was lost to them.

A second arrow sped—Harald's shaft; and a huge mallard, pierced through throat and body, sank to the ground. But the aim not being as true as Ralph's, the bird had strength to cry out, on which the rest, alarmed, spread their wings. Across the marsh they went, but ere they rose, a second unerring arrow from the first shooter found mark in one of them.

"Three birds to our first shoot—fortune is with

us," said Harald, as he took the punt towards where lay the duck.

"Wilt have still better sport anon," rejoined the Fowler. "My work last night was not for naught;" and he laughed.

He spoke truly. A while of silent punting, and the hunters came within sight of a second feeding brood. Again Harald guided the boat to within shooting distance; again the bowstrings twanged, and two birds rewarded the shooters' aim.

Thus they continued until the sun stood high above their heads and the bottom of the punt held a goodly taking of the wildfowl. Ralph the Fowler had made good his words, and Harald was sensible of some regret that Osric had not accompanied them. But the outlaw had refused. That the Fowler was not in truth the same as the dead Galwegian he could not but agree, yet, whatever his thoughts may have been, he had suggested there was something uncanny about the man, and, therefore, had refused to go a-fowling with the others. He had even tried to persuade Harald not to go, but when the youth had demanded his reason he had returned evasive answers.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

And Found other Game

CONTENT with their spoils, the wildfowlers made ready to return. Game was still abundant; numberless channels still remained unexplored; but it had been understood that the army would continue the advance that day, and return was necessary. Now, however, it was Ralph who had the punt pole in his hand; 'twas not fair, he urged, that Harald should do all.

"Canst remember from where we started?" Harald asked. "Each way hereabouts seemeth alike to me."

"Nay, there is that to guide us—and that—and that," the other answered.

He pointed to many objects, professing to recognize them, but as Harald had said, to him each part of the great marsh seemed the counterpart of the other.

But Ralph was confident; through this waterway and that he piloted the punt. Suddenly he dwelt upon the pole, staying the boat's course, and face and body became fixed with earnest attention. He was staring behind him, and one hand left the pole and was raised in act of claiming

silence. Then he dropped quickly in the bottom of the punt.

"Hist!" he said, in answer to Harald's question, and speaking quickly. "Yonder is a goose amid the reeds. We have come past without disturbing of it. Shoot, shoot."

The punt was now in an open space of water fifty yards in extent, and perhaps a third that distance from the nearer belt of reeds. It was there the Fowler indicated the goose to be. He pointed with his finger, and in a few seconds Harald descried the half-hidden body of the bird, quite motionless.

"We have none such," whispered Ralph.

And Harald laid arrow to string, crouching over the gunwale of the punt. The shaft sped, entering the creature, and Ralph raised a shout of triumph.

"'Tis shallow here," he cried; and without ado leaped into the water, meaning to wade out and recover the goose.

Reaching the reeds, he stooped and plunged into them, the waving blades almost concealing him. Harald heard him shout again, a different cry from the first; there was a splash, and the man disappeared completely.

At the same moment, from half-a-dozen points along the line of reeds, both before and behind the boat, whizzed a flight of arrows. Some struck the punt's sides and remained quivering, half the number flew harmlessly overhead, and one rebounded from Harald's steel cap.

A cry of surprise broke from the youth, so

utterly unsuspected was the attack. Who had thought that this desolate marsh held enemies? Who could they be? But the instinct of preservation caused him immediately to drop to the bottom of the punt just as a second flight from the invisible shooters amid the reeds swept towards him.

The punt's sides were low, but, thrusting aside the carcases of the slain ducks, Harald found protection. There came a third discharge; some of the shafts struck the water, others hit the boat, and one stuck in the further side, six inches above his haunch.

The assailants, who were they? Sufficient answer came in a savage, exultant yell that echoed in his ears as he raised his eyes over the gunwale to where Ralph had entered the reeds. The shout he recognized; it was that of the Galloway Scots, but how they should have tracked him into the marsh, or why the attempt at slaughter had been delayed until now, he could not conceive. The glance showed him no movement amid the reeds, proof that his companion had either fallen into their hands or been slain as he approached the dead goose.

He thought of defence, of retaliation, but either seemed to be denied him. His position was one of deadly peril. Afloat in an open boat, his enemies, in numbers such as he could but guess but evidently sufficiently numerous, on all sides of him, the target of hidden marksmen, and unable to escape without revealing himself, he was indeed in sore straits. And what irked

him most sorely was the knowledge that he could not strike an effective blow in return. His bow he had, with many arrows, but they availed him little. At what could he shoot? A waving of the reeds?

But it was not consonant with the nature of the Northumbrian, nor agreeable to his courage, to yield thus tamely. To be shot to death as boys might slay a wolf that had fallen into a pit was no fitting end to one who held it dishonour to die other than fighting. He reached out for his bow, took from the quiver at his belt an arrow and fitted it to the string. Then he raised his eyes cautiously above the side fronting the nearer bank. It was but for an instant, but he had view of the body of a man standing between the reeds. An impatient enemy, or one curious to know if the arrows had taken effect.

The view was imperfect but it sufficed. The arrow was loosed, and as he dropped down again there sang above him half-a-dozen shafts. But with the singing mingled a harsh screech of pain, sufficient proof his own missile had not gone astray. The Galwegian had paid for his eagerness with his life.

Again resounded the Scots' shout of triumph and the punt was target for further arrows. Very still lay Harald, his bow ready to bend, and once again the Galloway men paid toll for their impatience or confidence in the accuracy of their shooting. Of this, indeed, they had scant reason to boast; but, like all Scotsmen, the Highlanders excepted, the bow was to them a weapon of

infrequent use, and their skill with it was not great.

And then there happened that which showed to Harald a danger on which he had not reckoned. Straight down from the sky an arrow fell and the point wounded him slightly in the thigh. One amid his enemies had obviously found a means of striking at him against which he could not guard.

A second arrow fell thus, and then a third. The one penetrated a duck against which his leg rested, the other narrowly missed his eyes. The marksman was more expert than his fellows; he had a nice estimate of distance; ere long one of his arrows was likely to inflict a serious wound. Harald wondered that the example was not followed by the other archers.

A fourth arrow grazed his cheek, and the youth came to a desperate conclusion. Suddenly he stood upright in the punt, the pole in his hands, and thrust it into the water. A yell greeted his appearance; and as he pushed against the pole for a second stroke there came left and right, a rain of shafts. One stuck in the punt pole but the remainder flew wild. Ere the assailants could shoot again he was at the bottom of the punt, now six yards from where it had been before.

Again he tried the manœuvre, and with success; slowly he drew away from his assailants. And these, carried away by the ardour of the man-chase, no longer kept to their concealment behind the reeds. They showed themselves plainly,

yelling and gesticulating with their weapons. But one amongst them seemed a better archer than the rest; for several times an arrow went so near to Harald that it was but a matter of inches between himself and death.

So continued the fight, the series of attacks and cunning defences, the game of life and death wherein one player was debarred from active retaliation. He was as a rabbit in a burrow, pursued by not one but many ferrets. His enemies were all around him. Did he seek one of the many channels opening from the enclosed water? A volley of arrows proved him that they awaited him there. Never were so many shafts loosed for the taking of one life; the punt's sides bristled with them.

At length the arrow flight lessened; either the stock of missiles was exhausted or the hot temper of the Galwegians could not suffer such precarious mode of slaughter. From a clump of reeds dashed half-a-dozen spear-armed Scots, and half wading, half swimming, they came towards the boat.

Thirty yards was there to cover, and Harald still had a half-score of arrows in reserve. Three times he had opportunity to shoot, and his arrows went not astray. Then he betook himself to the heavy punt pole. Around the boat the water was at its deepest, and beneath his blows two of the swimmers sank. Then some waded out hip high and launched their javelins, and against these the Northumbrian had no defence. The light spears were the Galwegians' favourite weapons: they

directed them better than they did their arrows. One remained fast in Harald's clothing; a couple drew blood. In a few moments the unequal contest would have ended.

But the youth was not at the end of his resource. From the bottom of the punt he took his sheathed sword, not his great two-handed weapon, but the smaller blade, such as was frequently carried by Englishmen in addition to the large one, and with it between his teeth he leaped overboard. Like an otter could he swim and dive; and as an otter evades the pursuing hounds so did he hope to elude his enemies. The thick reeds afforded cover of a kind that would screen his passage along one of the narrow channels could he gain it unobserved, and alternately flying and hiding there was chance of his escape.

Thirty feet from the punt his head came above the surface to be greeted with triumphant shouts from the Scots, who now appeared from their hiding-places, a score or more, and, leaping and wading, followed his progress. To the end of the open water he swam, only to be headed off. He dived, coming up beside the reeds, and the hunters on the farther side raised a shout, telling that they saw him. For a moment he paused, knee deep in the slimy, evil-smelling water, regaining his breath. Then he forced a passage, put his foot on firm ground and drew himself up, dripping and weed-covered.

Twenty yards away, a line of reeds, pale green beneath the sun, marked the course of a waterway. Across the marsh—for now he stood plainly re-

vealed—hastened the pursuers, screaming harshly. He made a dash towards the water. One foot sunk in the green ooze; he drew it forth ere his ankle was covered, and found firm resting-place for the other limb. From tuft to tuft he leaped; sometimes his foot slipped, and the thick water splashed him to the face; his clothes were streaked with mud. But he gained the reeds, and as he did so they parted before a figure coming through them from the water side. The Scot held a spear, his own sword was in his hand, but there was neither time nor space for either to deliver a blow. The two bodies collided heavily, and the Scot, the lighter man, was hurled backward. So slippery and insecure was the foothold that Harald could not check himself, and he fell chest to chest upon the half-submerged man.

The struggle was of the briefest duration and ended in favour of the Englishman. The channel was narrow, the water of little depth; and, bent almost double, Harald waded along it with as great haste and as little noise as he could compass. But, as did many others, the channel, after shallowing to a bare foot of water, terminated in a dense cluster of reeds.

Here for a few moments he lay perdu, crouched on his hams in mud and slime, hearkening to the cries of his trackers floating over the dreary marsh. It seemed they had missed him. Then he cast a glance upwards. He remembered that the sun had been at his right hand when he and the Fowler entered the boat; it was now behind him. Of the extent of the marshland, where was his

present position, and how, did he escape the Scots, he could find his way out he did not know.

And Ralph the Fowler—what had been his fate? Was he stabbed or drowned? Had the Scots—— A sudden rough shaking of the reeds disturbed a couple of small marsh birds that had come twittering down the waterway; so strange a thought had flashed, lightning swift, into the Northumbrian's mind, that, forgetting himself, he almost leaped to his feet. 'Twas passing strange, had the Galwegians struck down his companion as he entered the reeds for the goose, that he should have heard no cry. He had been watching, listening, yet nought had happened to betoken a man's killing. Immediately, thoroughly, noiselessly, Ralph the Fowler had disappeared once the rushes hid him.

Neither sight nor sound had there since been, no sign. But—unlearned in treachery and dishonour, Harald could not give credence to the startling thought—amongst those who had loosed shafts at him since the attack began was one archer of a skill surpassing that of his fellows, who had devised the expedient of shooting into the air so that the shafts fell point downwards upon him as he lay in the bottom of the punt. Once when he showed himself but one arrow of a whole flight had gone near to him, his hand had been wounded slightly when resting, a momentary mark, on the punt's side. One archer so dexterous, the rest so inaccurate! What if the adroit one were Ralph the Fowler, not dead, nor prisoner, but a treacherous friend and ally of the Scots? Who had

guided the punt to where the Scots were lying in wait? Who had led him into the snare whence he had not yet escaped?

Could it be possible? Doubt, denial, acceptance, rejection, ran riot in the youth's bewildered mind. A score of trivial recollections came to him. Osric's lurking suspicion and dislike of the man who had been so eager to win his, Harald's, friendship. He called himself an Englishman; yet he had spoken of Red Ferchar's followers as his villeins. But the night before he had sworn by St. Denis. The Galwegian whose murderous intent had been checked by Osric had worn the Fowler's cloak and shoes.

"Thor!" breathed the Northumbrian. "Is it then that he is of the Scots? But why seeks he to harm me?"

Swifter than the swiftest gazehound does suspicion travel once it is unloosed, and it becomes the stronger as it advances. Whoever Ralph the Fowler might be, Harald came to assurance that he had meant to deliver him into the hands of the revengeful Galloway men.

And then a shout broke in upon his thinking, a cry that gave token his line of flight had been discovered, and warned him to leave his hiding-place. He took mud and plastered it upon his steel cap, and on hands and knees crept from out the reed bed. Beyond was ground of some firmness, though he was long in reaching it, and so close were the pursuers he could hear their splashing feet in the water. But, unseen, he passed over the wet soil to where two channels met, one

of some width, the other narrow. The depths he tested with his sword.

And here he attempted a device to throw his enemies off the scent. Taking his wet cloak, he flung it into the narrow drain, where it floated; then he put himself to swim along the broad and deep one, travelling under water so far as was possible, and coming up to breathe close by the banks.

Thus he proceeded, resting at intervals to recover strength, and cheered by the growing faintness of the cries behind him. Presently these ceased altogether, and he had hope that he had escaped those who had thought to slay him when entangled in the snare to which he had been beguiled.

But he was not yet wholly free. Treacherous quagmires came near to engulfing him; his limbs ached with the cold of frequent wading and swimming; there were stretches of bog and waterlogged ground to be crossed, a hundred dangers to be encountered ere yet he came to solid earth under his feet again. Where he was he knew not; by the sun had he sought to guide his course, but how far he might be from where he had entered the marsh he could not guess.

For many hours he wandered, and then he came upon a being more miserable and wretched-looking than himself, a man who looked no man at all, and was in truth a runaway slave from some Scottish dwelling. At sight of Harald's sword the poor creature fled; and the Englishman's patience was well-nigh exhausted ere he

could be made to understand that, so far from any harm being intended him, he should be well rewarded could he guide his captor whither he desired to go.

It was evening when the army's last camping-ground was reached, and there, sitting one horse, Harald's black reined to his knee, and gazing irresolutely round him, the young Northumbrian came upon Osric the Franklin.

The army had marched at midday, but the outlaw had remained behind in search for Harald, being of belief that ill had befallen him. When the two dismal figures came to him through the gloaming he believed them camp followers with thoughts of murder, and his sword came out.

But "Put up" cried the larger of the twain. "I am Harald Ulfsson, though I scarce know myself."

"Harald!" Osric was down from his horse and clasping the young man's hand. "I feared you dead. All day have I sought you, and now it was in my mind to ride on, find him who had slain you, and demand his death of the earl."

"And who is that?"

"Ralph the Fowler."

"He came back?" Harald asked eagerly.

"Why not? He was here when the army broke camp, and I believed him sure of your death; but my lord Osberne was not to be found, and so I waited. What hath happened?"

Harald told him. But he had a different answer for Osberne Siwardsson late that same night, when, without changing his dress or removing a

single mud-splash, he went where was the old earl, and with him his son, the prince Malcolm—a stalwart, handsome-looking man, but with a head out of all proportion to his body—Cospatrick, and the rest of the chiefs and great officers of the army. He had purpose in so going, and great was the surprise and loud the laughter his entrance caused.

"What have we here?" asked one. "Is it a bear?"

"Nay, rather a bundle of horse-cloths that some knave hath dropped into a ditch and set upon two legs," laughed another.

"Faugh!" cried a third, and he held his nose.

"But who is it? What doth it here?"

"'Tis a wild Pict," put in Malcolm.

"Wild enough, but no Pict—a good Englishman born," rejoined Osberne. "For I think him to be my good comrade Harald Ulfsson. What need you?" he asked.

"A bath," said the dainty-nostrilled one; but he spoke under his breath, for throughout the camp even now had Harald won a name for his courage and skill in weapons.

"Whom or what seek you, Harald Ulfsson?" Earl Siward asked.

But Harald's eyes were looking for a dark, thin-faced man, with level, meeting brows and a smiling lip. He sought in vain.

"Is not the knight Ralph, called the Fowler, here?" he cried.

"Ay, but a while since," half-a-score replied, looking around.

But there Ralph the Fowler was not ; unseen, he must have gone away while all eyed Harald.

"But what has happened, Harald?" asked Osberne. "On what quest have you been? I have had no sight of you this day."

"I have been wild-fowling, and have had to swim for my pains," the youth answered.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

A Deed of Daring

High and low throughout the camp Harald sought the Fowler, nor did he give attention to his own pressing needs of body until he was assured the man was not to be found. And here it may be said that not in Scotland did Harald ever recognize him again. Then he bathed, found clean garments, ate a mighty supper, and went to sleep for six hours.

The neighing of horses, the clatter of arms and armour, and the tumultuous shouting of many voices awakened Harald. Yawning, he stretched himself, and finally sat up beneath the rude arbour of boughs Osric and he had constructed. Spear-armed foot-soldiers were hurrying by; the knights horses were being led to where awaited their impatient masters; some men were engaged in snatching a hurried meal, and others were examining their weapons. A mighty commotion and seeming confusion prevailed everywhere. Men were eagerly talking together, saying that at last the enemy had been found, that Macbeth and his army lay but a few miles distant, and that a battle would be fought—was being fought.

Food and drink were hurriedly swallowed.

Harald donned his mail, saw to his arms, and with Osric at his knee, rode to where was the lord Osberne. In personal attendance on that brave general was Harald, one of the band of huscarles, men of tried valour, who acted as a personal guard. To these Harald had been admitted by reason of Osberne's favour, and perhaps his father's position of affluence and power, and with him went Osric.

A magnificent figure was Osberne, tall-statured and big of frame, clad in full armour, and with a golden-winged helmet. He greeted Harald kindly as the youth approached.

"Work for warriors and brave fighters to-day," he cried.

"'Tis said that the Scots king is here; is it so, my lord?"

"Nay, I know not that; but an army there is truly, and we are to fight them," replied Osberne. "There will be splitting of helmets, aye, and of heads too."

"The better," cried Harald. "We have waited over long for these coward Scots to show themselves."

"The cockerel that crows before the battle doth not always do so when the fight is finished," sneered a countryman of Malcolm, then arrived, and engaging in earnest talk with Osberne.

"Nor are Scotsmen cowards," added another, with an angry glare at the youth.

"By Odin, knights, but some are," laughed Harald. "I have had to do with some already—the Galloway men who are with us."

"Galloway is not Scotland," was the contemptuous rejoinder. "And when it comes to blows those who will play the better part will not be the English."

"Meaning myself, for instance?" asked Harald quickly.

"That is as may be," the Scot replied cautiously. "But if an Englishman will go two feet a Scot will go one beyond."

"To avoid being killed. Aye, I believe you, sirs."

"The English brat hath too long a tongue," the Scots growled together. "'Twere a pity the Galloway men let him live." For the story of Harald's battle with dead Ferchar was known throughout the camp.

"'Twas no fault of theirs."

"Nay, the swiftness of your horse's legs."

"One man cannot fight a hundred. Could you?"

But the bickering, of which there was no lack, since the Scots had no love of the English, though willing enough of their aid, went no further, the disputants following their leaders, who had separated to see to the marshalling of the troops under their respective commands.

Harald's hopes, however, were doomed to disappointment; of fighting there was little. The enemy's force seemed but a slight one—a few bodies of spearmen, an insignificant number of horse, and several bands of tartan-clad Highlanders armed with bows and arrows, heavy broadswords, targets, and here and there an axe.

Standing as they chose, a medley of fighting men without skilled formation, the Scots, who seemed surprised to find themselves so close to the invaders, watched from the hill-sides the regular advance of Siward's army. The Highlanders discharged a few flights of arrows, and, though the horse and spearmen retired over the crest as the English force drew near, these lingered as though unwilling to leave the field without exchange of blows. Shaking their weapons, they set up a tremendous yell that drowned the screaming of the pipers, and, anxious to taste blood, swept down the hill-side at a rapid gallop and threw themselves upon a few horsemen that rode in advance of the left wing, commanded by Lord Osberne.

Away went the advance riders, drowned beneath the living wave that rolled over them; but when Osberne led forward his men to meet them, the Highlanders suddenly halted, realizing their inferiority, stood for a moment hesitating, then broke and fled up the hill.

"A golden mark for a prisoner," shouted Osberne. Information concerning the movements of the Scots was valuable.

Scarcely had he spoken than from amongst his huscarles dashed a dozen aspirants. The reward was naught; to serve their leader much.

Heedless of the broken ground, they urged their horses in pursuit of the flying red-shanks. And amongst the first in that headlong race was Harald Ulfsson. Across the level ground between the two hills and up the lower slopes dotted with

plaided runners, the black did not head the line. Its master was too wise to urge it to its highest speed at the commencement; wind and strength would be required most when the ground became steep. And the Highlandmen had a long start. Amid the loose stones sprinkling the heath-clad hill-side Harald took the black with the faintest check upon the rein to curb the animal's great spirit. And thus he saved his horse.

One by one those in front were overhauled and passed until there was but a single rider ahead of the Northumbrian. And sixty yards beyond him, speedy as a horse, ran a clansman, a heavy, ponderous man, his plaid streaming behind him.

A thane from the West Riding, named Oswald and mounted on a white horse, was leading. He turned his head, saw how close was Harald to him, and urged his steed to greater speed. But the gallant brute could not respond; Harald's nursing of the black was now telling in his favour. He reached the white horse's tail, was level in five more bounds, and then a touch of the spur sent the black in front. Oswald, owning defeat, pulled up his blown horse, and was content to watch the taking of the prisoner.

Panting, the Highlander suddenly turned. Steel, if not flesh and bone, should save him, and to fight was dearer to his heart than to fly. His long sword came whirling out, he steadied himself, and when the black horse came within the sweep of his powerful arm he slashed at its forelegs. Not a yard further had the black ever

galloped could that swinging blow have struck: it had gone down crippled. But the rider's eye saw the danger, his strong hand averted it; there was a powerful tug at the reins, a wrench, and the clansman's sword sliced through naught but air. Before the man could recover himself for a second blow, Harald had slipped from the saddle and his hands gripped fast.

Dropping his sword, the Gael grappled with his foe. But his strength had been used in the running and the Northumbrian was fresh. His arms were fast in a waist hold; for a moment the pair swayed this way and that, and then the clansman was lifted bodily in the air and hurled to the ground. Before he had recovered from the shock of the fall his arms were fastened within his own plaid and he was powerless.

He was a weighty man, but Harald lifted him, and with him hanging over the black's withers, the youth rode gently down the hillside.

"A good horse," exclaimed Oswald, who had waited, as Harald came alongside. "Will you sell him, Harald Ulfsson?"

"Not I;" and Harald proudly patted the glossy neck. "Where I go he goes. The gold is not coined that would buy him of me. When he owns another master I shall be in Paradise."

"But for him my lord's prize had been mine," the other grumbled, and Harald laughed.

"'Tis not all in the horse's legs," he said. "But I doubt not on level ground your white would distance my black."

Which was possibly true, the thane's being the

lighter made horse. And with such comfort Oswald had need to be content.

"Who hath the Gaelic?" demanded Osberne, when the prisoner was brought before him for questioning.

One was found who could speak the clansman's tongue. Nor was the latter dumb. He answered readily enough, boastfully, fiercely. He affirmed that the army—his army—was so great as to be beyond counting: the soldiers were as the pebbles on the shores of Loch Vennachar; their watch-fires were as the stars of heaven; a hundred herds of beasts were slaughtered daily to provide them with food; their chieftains were as the straws in an oat sheaf and each as brave and strong as Cuculain.

They threatened him with the torture, and he smiled in bitter scorn; for each thrill of pain a hundred of the invaders should die. They spoke to him of death—an axe-edge was laid on his neck, and he laughed. What though they slew him, 'twould not avert their own certain end. Of them none should be left alive; their chieftains had told them so, and the king, for whom the powers of magic were fighting, had promised the chiefs.

Nay, that was not all: more fighting men were coming, from the isles, from Ireland; soon they would have come. The Saxons should be swallowed up, their kingdom invaded, and the big head of Malcolm should be stuck on a lance-point. That very day were their friends and brothers coming.

So he spoke, boldly, exultantly; a defiant savage that had fear of no man and believed implicitly all that his chief told him. A helpless prisoner, he faced Osberne Siwardsson as though he were a king instead of a poor kerne.

And in his triumphant boastings Osberne, who was a brave leader, and his father Ṣiward, who was a greater, believed they discovered somewhat of truth. He told them where Macbeth's army was posted—they believed it no more than a raiding party or, at best, an advance guard; and they judged that a reinforcement was to arrive to support them. That it had not yet come seemed indicated by the retreat of an hour before.

A council was held among the leaders. Malcolm required immediate advance, the more prudent and experienced earl counselled caution. Let them wait a day or two.

"When the Irish may have come," the Scottish prince cried angrily.

"They may be here now; we should know," retorted Siward.

"Let us storm their camp and prove as much for ourselves."

"They have a strong position; the Forth rolls between us, and it is swollen with rain," answered the old captain. "If we be attacked in crossing, a thousand men may overwhelm us."

"We can but die as brave men."

"And lose the crown ere yet you have stretched out your hand to grasp it. And the soldiers are mine," Siward reminded the over eager prince.

"Methought I had heard the Earl of North-

umbria spoken of as a brave man," sneered the Scot.

"Too brave to offer an insult which cannot be avenged," broke in Lord Osberne. "Listen, knights, let us find out our foemen's numbers, if their friends have arrived ; if not, we will force the river ; if they be too many for us, we will find crossing elsewhere. As for answer to what the prince hath said as to my father's courage, that will I take on myself, seeing that I am nearer to age."

Whereupon Osberne stood up, sword in hand, and the Scottish prince, perceiving that he had gone too far, made amends for his hastiness of tongue. But that the advice of the earl's son was best was so considered by all the English knights and captains ; though the Scots were in support of their prince, who was averse to it, in numbers they were the lesser, and they were forced to give way. None the less, there were those who sought to cast ridicule.

"And where will be found the man to do as my Lord Osberne desires?" asked Macduff, thane of Fife. "The Forth to cross—for the news must come swiftly—and it is in flood ; the enemy ; who will dare water and steel?—and for naught," he added, though beneath his breath.

"Amongst my huscarles," the Englishman said quietly.

"Who know not the river nor the enemy's tongue," sneered the Scot.

"Nevertheless, the man will be found to do it. Will one of your men go, thane?"

"For what reward?"

The Englishman stared without restraint; his lip curled.

"For what reward?" he repeated. "For the winning of some honour; for the love of me; for his fellows' good; for that he may show Scottishmen what an Englishman can do."

He stamped, raised his voice, calling to a page; and when the youth appeared, "Bring hither," he said to him, "Harald Ulfsson, Oswald of Wharfedale, and Osric the Franklin."

Before the Scots had finished glowering the three named came to them, and Osberne Siwardsson spoke directly.

"We would have news of our foes yonder, and at once," he said; "and I have sent for you to cross the river, to learn of the Scots' numbers, and if the Irish have arrived as our prisoner told, and to go and return between sunset and sunrise. Are you the men?"

And without hesitation came the answer. "We are," they cried, speaking as one man, and the faces of the two younger grew hot with pleasure.

For a few moments there was silence, the English smiling; and then a Scottish knight leaped to his feet. And his face also was hot, though not with pleasure, but anger.

"What an Englishman can do a Scot will," he cried angrily. "I claim leave to go with these."

"A brave man the more—so much the better," explained Earl Siward.

The chosen four were together talking, the Scot fiercely eager, the Englishmen thoughtful and confident, all debating the venture.

"We will swim the river," the former cried.

"Where?" asked Osric, the eldest of them.

The river was in high flood, within six inches of the top of its steep banks; uprooted trees and giant limbs were being borne down by the swift current; the depths were treacherous, the distance great.

"Here," replied the Scot. They were standing beside the foam-flecked, tearing river.

"And be drowned."

"We will take a boat," put in Harald decidedly, and his companions nodded.

"A boat would be sunk," rejoined the Scot. "Now I——"

"Would sink also," retorted Harald. "But a boat will not."

And leaving their ally, Patrick the Fleming, as he was named (from the origin of his father), and of the family to be afterwards known as Douglas, to follow if he chose, the three sought along the river banks for some fisherman's habitation where a boat might be procurable.

They came upon that which they sought, and when it was known that money would be paid, a dozen fishermen brought boats for their choice.

"Too heavy," declared Oswald of Wharfedale; and, indeed, the craft was one of great size and weight.

"A lighter would be dashed in pieces," rejoined Harald.

"Four men are not strong enough to row her across."

"You say rightly," he answered the Scot;

"therefore we must have some of these men to aid us."

But to this the fishermen gave flat refusal; nor could they be brought to see otherwise, until they perceived the bargainers were men ready to assert by force their need of the service asked for. When it was made clear to them boat and selves would be taken and used at the sword's point, for taken all should be, the fisher-folk gave way, deeming gold better payment than steel.

"Shouldst have slain one, Sir Harald," cried the Scottish knight, now eager as the rest, "the others would have come readily enough then."

"Maybe," answered the Northumbrian (no knight yet, though Sir Patrick so addressed him); "but since their lives are endangered let them be recompensed."

So the fishermen, six stout carles, made ready, though not with willingness, and Harald directed them to fasten within two great pieces of stout canvas as many large fragments of stone. To each was then attached a strong cord of some length in such fashion that unfastening was not possible. One of these he had placed in the stem of the boat, the other in the stern, to be used as anchors to keep the craft from being carried away when the other bank of the river was reached. And he looked forward to being some time inland, though how the news required was to be gained he had not yet planned.

Then they entered the river, and so swift was the running of the turbid water, it needed all the strength of the eight lusty rowers to drive a

passage forward. In the fore part of the boat sat Harald; the rudder was held by Sir Patrick, who showed no liking for the handling of so unknightly a tool as an oar.

The crossing was perilous; gloaming had fallen before the launching of the boat, and ere they were a dozen yards from the southern bank there appeared here and there on the northern side lights which betokened the watch-fires of Macbeth's force. A great wood came down almost to the water's edge, and in this wood were camped the soldiers. But of these none in the boat thought; present dangers were sufficient. The rushing water almost wrenched away the oars, driving the boat out of her course, and again and again her overturning was threatened. It seemed as though human strength could not prevail against the force of the flood. The hearts of the fishermen weakened, despite the example set them by the franklin and the thane, rowing amongst them. They grumbled, threatening to throw down their oars; and would have done so, declaring they would drown whether they rowed or not; but the Scottish knight at one end took to his sword, and Harald at the other to his clenched fist, and the men decided a death in prospective was preferable to its immediate accomplishment.

A straight course from bank to bank was impossible; when half the width was made the boat was a good forty yards lower than at starting-point. That they had reached so far without mishap from the great timbers that came swirling down half submerged was due to the keen eyes

and steady hand of the steersman. Again and again was collision with some mighty tree trunk avoided by no more than a hair's-breadth, and Harald's opinion of Sir Patrick improved.

Past the centre of the river, where the current ran strongest, it seemed as though the boat could not be taken. Cheered by their leader, the oarsmen tugged until the veins in their foreheads swelled to the bursting point and their breath came in sobbing gasps. Every moment the boat threatened to overturn. At last she began to move onward. Harald, putting aside the fisherman nearest him, took his seat and his oar, and the young Northumbrian's mighty strength turned the balance. With unwearied muscles he toiled like a giant, putting forth the power of two, and the current was conquered. Towards a tiny bay the Scot steered the boat, took her carefully past the projecting spit of timber-covered land, and into comparatively slow water.

Turning his head, Harald saw that which he sought—a place where the boat might be anchored, while some went on land for the purpose that had brought them there. Relinquishing the oar, he stood up in the prow. He had perceived that, heavy as were the stones brought with them, they were of insufficient weight to hold fast against the swift current, and a better plan presented itself to him. To the very edge of the bank came the forest; huge limbs of the great trees overhung the water, some, so high was the flood, dipping therein.

Stooping, he heaved up one of the heavy, canvas-

wrapped boulders ; steadying himself, he balanced the weight on the palm of his right hand drawn in towards the shoulder. Left foot foremost he stood, gathering his strength and awaiting the opportunity to use it, the while the boat moved jerkily alongside the bank and a couple of oar lengths from it. His muscles suddenly tensed ; arm, shoulder, back, and right leg moved in unison ; and as his right side was turned forward and his arm suddenly shot forth propelling the stone through the air, his weight was shifted to the advanced foot. Many a time had he competed in pitching the stone ; none at Olafsdale amongst his father's lusty huscarles could equal him for distance, but never had he played the game under such conditions as now.

Through the air was launched the weight ; high and swift it flew, then struck amid the branches, dropped, and stuck fast behind some branch. The rope tightened, quivered beneath the strain, and the boat stopped with a jerk.

Harald had chosen his place well. The current, swinging the other end of the boat round, took it to within two paces of where the water covered by a bare two feet the mouth of a narrow gully or inlet into the bank.

"Over with the other stone," cried Harald in a low voice, "and then to work."

Through the fishermen he made his way to the stern, unbuckling his long sword. The Scottish knight rose to his feet.

"Who besides we two, Sir Harald?" he asked eagerly.

"Osric and myself leave the boat, Sir Patrick," was the answer.

The Scot uttered an angry exclamation. "But I claim," he began, when Harald stopped him.

"Your place is here," he said decidedly. "You speak the tongue of these carles," indicating the fishermen. "Osric and I will seek the information."

"And is mine the baser part of keeping the boat?" cried Sir Patrick. "No, my honour forbids. I am no horse-boy. I go to land."

"Nay, sir," Harald replied. "You will stay. Here is the greater honour and danger. What were these knaves to leave us? 'Tis naught to glide through the camp and find what soldiers be here. All are asleep. A child might do this work. Stay you with Oswald, and make sure of our safe return."

So the Scot gave way, and he and the Wharfedale thane kept watch over the rebellious fishermen, frightened and eager to leave the neighbourhood of the Scots, since death would surely follow discovery. And Harald and Osric, with axe and dagger in belt—weapons for short-arm use and requiring little space—stepped knee-deep into the water and waded into the gurgling mouth of the inlet.

"Up through the gully," whispered Harald, and the outlaw silently obeyed. Of twice Harald's age, he recognized the latter's quality of leadership.

It was not so dark that seeing was impossible. A moon of the second quarter was in the sky, and though many black clouds darkened it as they scurried by, the light was not continuously

obscured. It was a night suited to the project of the adventurers. The rushing of the flooded river mingled with the noise of the wind amid the foliage of the trees sufficiently, as Harald hoped, to drown any sounds he and his companion might unavoidably cause in their progress.

To the Scottish knight he had so spoken only to soothe his easily wounded pride. To go about the camp, where it was too early, as yet, for many to be sleeping, was a more dangerous undertaking than the keeping of the boat, though in truth he expected that to be no light matter. Discovery meant death. But realization of the peril gave to him exhilaration of mind. Fail in his mission he would not, nay, must not, for he stood, together with his companions, as pledge for Osberne Siwardsson's confidence in English courage and skill. He had been chosen for a task, and he would perform it.

Side by side he and Osric paddled along the gully. This was some six feet wide, with shelving sides of perhaps a man's height, and of a considerable length. The ground sloping somewhat acutely after the first couple of fathoms, from ankle depth of water one stepped on to dry ground. Here and onward the gully widened, and a more gradual ascent led to the level of the forest ground. Clear of the water, the two men halted.

"Whither go we now? to right or left?" asked Osric quietly.

"I caught the gleam of more than one fire as we came down," said Harald.

"Aye, and others lie ahead. I saw them as we stood in the boat."

"Then 'twere best to separate. Take thou the left hand, Osric, and I the right. Time will be saved thereby."

"And we have need for that; I like not the looks of those who rowed us."

"Nor I; and our two might find them over many for them did they seek to turn back. If it comes to fighting the noise would betray us."

"Have no fear of that," rejoined the outlaw. "Sounds outside travel not far into a forest; my outlawry taught me that. But we need to hasten, for yon Scot we have left behind us——"

But Harald was not heeding; the moon shining into the gully's length had brought to his eyes some object gleaming faintly from beside a tussock of coarse grass. He went to it, and came back to Osric, a small knife in his hands.

"A Highlander's knife," he cried. "There was one such on the man taken prisoner this morning. Some one has been within the gully, and lately, for the steel is not dulled."

"And some one, or my ears deceive me, is coming hither now," Osric said hastily.

"To find the knife; or mayhap this is where they draw water for the horses," Harald replied. "To the top of the gully, Osric; haste thee, man; I will take the other side. A prisoner might save us much labour. Wait you for my signal."

Noiselessly each sought the level ground above, flung themselves at full length, and, covered by the darkness, they awaited the comer. But there

were two, and they were talking grumblingly. Barely clad men, they were not clansmen, but evidently dwellers in the district, forced by the soldiers to do such menial work about the camp as their masters ordered. Between them they bore a stout pole, resting upon their shoulders, and from this hung a couple of bullock hides, roughly trimmed and shaped into rude bags. Harald was right in his conjecture; it was to obtain water at the gully the men had been sent.

"'Twas here I dropped it," cried one, as they halted at the end of the gully.

"What matters a knife?" replied the other peevishly. "There will be dead men enow ere long either this side the river or t'other now that the Saxons have come, and thou wilt be able to take thy choice of other things besides knives."

But despite his comrade's growlings, the owner of the lost tool stopped and groped on the ground, unconscious of the hidden ones whose eyes and ears followed the indistinct movement.

"Come, come," the waiting man said impatiently. "I have love of my skin if thou hast not of thine. Bethink thee of thy father whom one slew yesterday because he delayed over his task."

"I do," was the fierce answer. "I marked the man: therefore do I wish to find the knife."

There was an exclamation, the sound of a kick, and with the pole adjusted again the two men dropped within the gully.

Down to the water they stumbled, and behind them, Osric warned by a slight clicking sound, the two watchers rose to their knees. Had the men

turned they must have seen the dark figures crouched a little above their heads, and stealthily crawling forward. But they were concerned with their make-shift buckets, and were just about to lower the first into the water when the moon shone out, and looking along the river one caught sight of the boat.

He did not yell, or if he did the noise was drowned by a sudden uproar that arose from the boat, a shout of rage that broke into a storm of hoarse cries, and was followed immediately by a sharp yell of pain. So wholly astounded was the fellow that he remained gaping. And then he saw naught, nor did his ears give him acquaintance with what was toward. Could he have used them they would have made known to him further shouts and screams, the sharp ring and clatter of steel, and the thudding of heavy blows, all that told of a brisk and sanguinary fight near at hand.

Nor was his companion in better case or allowed greater information. He had not seen the dark mass of the anchored boat with its waiting crew, but he did hear the horrible clamour that suddenly broke from it. And then upon him, too, fell swift and complete want of sight and hearing.

The cause of this was Harald and the Saxon outlaw. Without attracting attention of the water seekers, they had advanced so far along the gully's sides that they had reached to a little behind the men, then standing within a foot of the water. It was the moment before Harald gave the signal for a leap that the one had made his unlucky discovery, and the fishermen in the boat,

having screwed their courage to the act, had flung themselves upon Sir Patrick and Oswald, intending to throw them into the river.

And the leap was not to be stayed. Full upon the backs of the two carles came the Englishmen, and so sudden the shock, so great the falling weight, that each man went down incontinent upon his stomach, his face in the water and his arms spread abroad. The surprise was complete; the men were rendered helpless.

In an instant the assailants had recovered themselves. Well enough they knew what was taking place in the boat—no more than either had feared. Equally assured were they that the clamour would reach the ears of the encamped Scots, alarming them, and giving rise to instant activity to discover the cause. But Harald had no mind to lose all at the moment of accomplishment.

"We keep these," he shouted to Osric.

The prisoners were not yet taken, however. They were strong fellows, and though so completely surprised, not to be secured easily. But Harald Ulfsson's wit and strength were against them. Kneeling in the water, he placed a hand on the nape of each, and in danger of suffocation, they could offer scant resistance to Osric. He, following Harald's direction, drew their arms behind their backs and securely fastened their wrists.

"To the boat," cried Harald. "I will bring these"; and with one under each arm as men will carry small logs, he waded towards the craft.

There the fight was dying out. Sir Patrick and Oswald, one at either end, had made such impression on the fishermen that their intentions changed. They had heard the two men come down to the water, and feared they were the foremost of an attacking force. And for that they thought of flight, or, at the worst, to seek propitiation by the offering of two prisoners, they were not, perhaps, to be blamed. They took to their knives and the oars, and, having less determined men to deal with, might have succeeded. Sir Patrick and Oswald guarded the anchors, and their assailants to reach these must destroy them first. Blood was drawn, and the coming of Osric disheartened the fisherfolk. They huddled into the middle of the boat, fearing killing, and as much the casting of themselves overboard.

"Hew the knaves down," shouted Sir Patrick; but Osric stayed his sword.

"Hold back, sir knight," he cried soberly. "We cannot get back without their aid."

And then Harald reached the boat and flung therein his prisoners. He clambered in himself, and the men hastened to fit the oars within the pins. There was no time to lose. Already shouts from the forest warned them the enemy had been alarmed, and before all were in their places a straggle of Highlanders filled the gully. The moonlight showed them the boat, and with fierce shouts they advanced into the water. No time was there for the hauling in of the anchoring stones. With his axe Harald severed one rope, Sir Patrick did the same with the other, and the

current took the boat past the mouth of the gully, flaming with the torches some of the clansmen had brought with them. Fresh arrivals came hurrying down but they could do naught. Animated by the Englishmen, threatened by their countryman, the fishermen gained control over the boat and forced a passage out into the river. Pursuit was useless; the enemy had no boats. A few harmless arrows were sent after them, but the yelling Highlanders could do no more. Uncertain of what the surprise meant, they stood knee-deep in the water, watching the receding boat, and, no doubt, screaming their hopes that it might be overset.

To cross the river was no less difficult than it had been the first time. The men were wearied, and more than once the current mastered them; yet they gained the bank at last, and drifted down until a suitable landing-place was found. There they disembarked, and Harald paid to the rowers the amount promised, greatly to their surprise and the indignation of the Scottish knight.

"The treacherous dogs!" he cried hotly. "They would have slain us, and left you with the enemy. The dule-tree and a rope were their fitting reward."

"Nay," laughed Harald. "They came under our will, poor carles; and as for killing, why, each man's skin is dearer to him than another's. Beyond that, the payment was our promise."

Guided by one of the men, they sought the English camp, the prisoners unwilling, but

yielding to circumstance ; and at Lord Osberne's tent these were handed over. And after that night, there was no more gainsaying by the Scots chiefs of the fitness of the English soldiers for any matter for which courage was required.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH

How Harald went a-raiding

A FORTNIGHT thence the English army was in Strathearn. A battle had been fought, and, thanks to the information of the two men whom Harald had brought back with him from his midnight venture, Macbeth's force, posted on the bank of the Forth to check the English advance, had been taken on the flank. Those who survived fled north to join the army the king had gathered for the struggle that was to decide the fate of his crown and kingdom.

From that battle Harald came unscathed and with promise of knighthood. The second he owed to Osberne, the first to himself. Valiantly he bore himself in the day-long fight; and of the escaping clansmen there were many who bore away with them the picture of the black-horsed warrior whose terrible axe had wrought such destruction among them. His arm seemed tireless, his strength irresistible. Claymore and spear were turned against him in vain.

Through the fight Osric the outlaw was ever at his back. If Harald had forgotten already the enmity of the Galloway men he had not, and he

feared the opportunity that a battle offers of avenging private wrongs might be seized. Naught happened, yet his face was gloomy when Harald and he rested together that night.

"I have seen Ralph the Fowler this day," he said abruptly.

Harald started and looked up from his meal. "Where?" he cried.

"In the battle," Osric replied. "I caught but a glimpse of him, yet I was not mistaken. Know you who he is?"

"Aye; one who when he stands face to face with me will have need to fear death."

"Aye, but beside?"

"Nay; I have thought, but why he should have reason for desiring to kill me I do not know. I had ne'er seen him before."

"But I have; it came to me to-day after I had seen him. Call you to mind the day when we rode with shackled limbs prisoners to the Norman?"

"I am scarce like to forget it."

"The Fowler was at the Norman's elbow."

"Art sure?" asked the youth after a short silence.

"Aye, I marked him. He knew me, and I had seen him at the castle of Sir Roux d'Assobert. He struck me as they tied me upon the horse, and mocked at me. Fool that I should not have remembered. But he then wore a moustache. 'Tis he, Harald; the man of him who procured your outlawing."

"And whose hate is such that he would gain

my slaying thus! Oh! Norman, may I lie in Nifleheim hereafter if I exact not from you a reckoning for this," cried Harald.

Were Osric not deceiving himself, the purpose of the Fowler with the army was clear, the lure to the marsh easily explained. That the Norman should have taken advantage of Harald's unlucky quarrel with the Galloway Scots to use them for the carrying into effect of the treacherous business wherewith he had been entrusted was proof of the man's cunning; that his plan should fail he could not have foreseen; it seemed perfect. His disappearance and dogging of the army were proof of his intention to carry out the order given him. To challenge him and force him to fight had been Harald's intention when he came safely out of the snare; and this the man had foreseen beyond doubt. While Ralph remained alive Harald's life would be in danger; to secure it the man must be placed beyond the power of doing ill.

But this opportunity did not come. With Osric at his back, Harald made search where the Galloway men were encamped as the likeliest lurking-place of his enemy. But Ralph was not to be found. The Scots eyed him sullenly, standing together and muttering as he went by, but they made no attempt at attack. Then he went to Osberne, told him all, and begged permission to leave the army to search for Ralph. But Osberne could not spare him; so Harald went with the troops into Strathearn, and for a fortnight there was naught seen of Ralph the Fowler.

In Strathearn the army halted for a week awaiting the arrival of a body of soldiers under Siward, Osberne's son, the commander having learned that fresh levies were daily pouring in to the aid of Macbeth, who lay a few miles north-east of Perth. The Irish had succeeded in reaching him; and animated by the hopes of plunder held out to them, the wild men from the Isles, the mountaineers of Badenoch, of Atholl, of Breadalbane, and the clansmen of the Braes o' Mar and Angus, flocked to his standard in their thousands. Little caring with whom they fought, the men of one district hardly restrained from crossing swords with the arrivals from another, these plaided warriors were difficult to hold in check, but for a time the king succeeded. Yet their spirit of slaughter required some outlet, and to prevent it being loosed among themselves, he did not deny the various tribes occasional forays on their own account. Thus, as the two armies lay but a short distance apart, Harald found more than one opportunity for the use of his sword.

With a score of men at his back he would ride out, raiding the glens and the hills for beasts and sheep for the feeding of the army; and, if such foray yielded also a skirmish with a roving band of Highlandmen, the better pleased was the leader. Many wounds he took in these petty battles; and gaining great esteem and honours from Earl Siward and his son, to him was entrusted the leading of a more considerable troop. Both in his own camp and to the enemy was he speedily known as "The Axebearer," thus reviving

the name whereby his long dead ancestor had been distinguished.

To Harald at the end of the week lying in Strathearn came Sir Patrick the Fleming, greatly irritable and frowning.

"Why wait we here rusting with doing naught?" he demanded peevishly, sitting himself on the bundle of heather that formed his companion's bed. "A day's march yonder lies the Scottish crown and we may not gather it. Why is this?"

"Ask of our leader," the Northumbrian answered. "I am no general. Nor am I as hasty as you. But then, mayhap, 'tis because I have no crown to take, nor aught else."

"But are you not weary?"

"Nay; wherefore? And as for rusting—by Odin, I never felt less like it. Nor is there reason for it. I am well content."

"With sitting still?" sneered the Scot.

"Aye; at the proper season I can even be content with that. But"—he glanced at the Scot's unsoiled armour—"even with my leisure I have no time for the polishing of my mail."

"That is my page's business," was the lofty answer. "Mine is to fight."

"And mine aught that seems necessary to what I have in hand—even the taking of rust from my steel cap," answered Harald. "But then I have no page. At present, Sir Patrick, I am about to water my horse, for in a little while my business will be to get to saddle."

"Where go you?"

"To wherever these scowling redshanks may

have laid by a store of oxen or sheep that will come useful for the staying of our hunger. 'Tis ill for them, poor carles, but we cannot starve."

"A drover's task."

"Aye; but a merry enough one; and at least it keeps our limbs from rusting, though it will bring the same to our mail. Will you make one with us? We may return muddy."

To this the Scot agreed; and he rode forth with Harald, a jay beside a dusty crow, and little able to understand the Englishman's contentment with so unknightly a work as leading a band of foragers. But he brightened as the journey progressed.

"Here we won forty kine yesterday," observed Harald gaily, as they crossed the entrance to a wooded glen through which a little stream ran. "An old man told us the nearest cattle were at Perth, but we found them closer at hand than that."

Sir Patrick sniffed scornfully.

"And over yonder hill-crest, towards the forenoon," went on Harald without noticing the sniff, "we found twice as many sheep."

"And you took these also," sneered Sir Patrick.

"When we had slain those who were with them," replied Harald blithely. "The sheep were wanted for the other army, and as the Highlandmen would not give them to us, we had to take them. No sense in feeding our enemies to be strong enough to slay us."

"What said the Highlandmen?" asked the knight.

It was paltry—this squabbling over carcases of animals when the struggle for Scotland's crown was imminent, yet his curiosity was stirring.

"What I should have done had the demand been made of me," was the frank reply.

"They fought?"

"Passing well. They took away their chieftain's body."

"And you the sheep?"

"Aye."

"Have you had other fights when—when——"

"When gathering food? Aye. In the afternoon our right to take our capture safe back to camp was questioned. I think there were ten score against us."

"And how many men had you?" Sir Patrick was becoming interested.

"As many as you see now with nine more who were then alive."

"Two score against ten score!"

The Scottish knight opened his eyes widely. He understood why Harald made no complaint as to inaction. He had thought a squire, at best, good enough to do such cattle-driving as the requirements of an army demanded; he was changing to the opinion that even himself might not be out of place where so much was going forward.

"There was need of fighting to save your lives," he commented.

"And bring off the beasts," added Harald.

Sir Patrick said no more, but when another mile had been covered, he inquired if his companion were expecting a similar happening that day.

"They have not yet failed us," was the cheerful answer. "The redshanks do not shrink from blows. Moreover, we may well expect them to-day, for yon carle"—Harald pointed to a dark-skinned, ragged-clothed, bare-legged Highlander trotting at the stirrup of Osric—"has come to us with knowledge of a spreagh, as he names it, to be had for the taking; young stots, a hundred or more, and with none but a few old men to guard them."

"How is this? Where lay they?"

"A thought near to where camp the redshanks; hence the feeble care. He knoweth the place, and hath said it, but I cannot lay my tongue to the name. He will guide us."

"Bethink you this may be a ruse?" the Scot asked after thinking a while. "I should fear it."

"So thought I, sir knight. You are prudent. But 'twill be unlucky deceit for our guide if it prove so, for Osric yonder will split his head at sign of a redshank intending us ill. Be therefore of good cheer."

"Nay, it moves me little," Sir Patrick replied carelessly.

He spoke again after an hour of hard riding, warning Harald further against treachery of the guide, as indication of which, though the hiding-place of the herd was due north, it was clear they had not been travelling in a straight line, which fact he proved by position of the sun.

"True," Harald answered. "But we have kept to the valleys, Sir Patrick, and these run not always as we would wish; but I have no desire

to take to the hill-tops that we may catch the eye of any prowling Highlandmen."

At which explanation Sir Patrick praised Harald for his discretion, and bit his lip for that his question had shown himself of inferior sense.

A wide glen they reached at last, heather clad, and sprinkled with great boulders, tumblings from the rocky sides of the enclosing hills. No track was there, but the troop followed the course of a brawling stream. At the far end of the glen the hills drove inwards as if they intended to meet, but stopped abruptly when an arrow-flight apart, thus forming a Titanic gateway to a deep gap or ravine beyond, a narrow mountain pass over which the clouds hung, forming as it were both a cover and the further extremity.

A wild and savage sight it was, bereft of all that speaks of humanity, desolate and gloomy; where naught was to be seen but brown heather and black and slate-coloured rock, with never a gayer tint to afford relief. Even the water of the stream ran darkly. A few straggling bushes reared here and there above the heather clumps, and now and again a stunted tree, the leaves standing stiff and withered from the thin branches. The abode of solitude it seemed; not even the note of a chance bird broke the stillness.

Into this drear waste came the English horsemen with dull clang of iron and cheery jangling of harness, and Harald reined in his steed and looked about.

"Here doth the carle say?" he cried to Osric.

"Aye; the beasts are yonder he says," replied

the franklin, pointing forward at the gap, gloomy as a wolf's throat.

Again Harald looked about him, but there was nothing to awaken suspicion. Until their advent, the foot of man might well never have entered the glen.

"Tell him we can hear naught of the beasts—they are not usually silent," he cried. "And also that his throat will be cut if he have deceived us."

These two items were made known to the guide, who, in return, replied volubly and gesticulated much. Of his gibberish the Saxon could make out but little more than the half.

"He says he knows that," he translated, "and is willing to lose his life if the stots are not there. What else I cannot tell."

"Let me speak to him;" and Sir Patrick moved his horse to the other side of the guide and interrogated him.

"It is right, Sir Harald," the knight exclaimed; "though his speech is not of the best Gaelic. He says the cattle are in byres, and so we cannot hear them."

"The better reason for their crying out," muttered Harald. "Forward, my men; keep open eyes; and, Osric, shift thou not thy grip of the guide's neck."

They covered the mile; naught happened, naught was seen; but, nearing the gap, Harald again gave the word to halt. He desired to know what lay beyond that frowning gateway beside steers in byres. Therefore, being an Englishman, and a Northumbrian, he went himself. And he

took the guide with him. Were treachery afoot the first effects of it should not miss the guide.

Were there foes in hiding an arrow would be the first intimation of it, he judged, and he kept his round shield ready for the covering of his face. To the gap's mouth he came, and there before his eyes stood proof of the guide's honesty, a cluster of rudely-built, dry-walled stone buildings, shelter good enough—in the Highlands—for men, and assuredly so for steers.

For a while he stood; then the black horse neighed, and to the door of one of the byres came a grey-headed, patriarchal-looking Highlander, miserably clad. He stared at the steel-clad horseman with the golden-winged helmet; then he uttered a cry, and one similar to himself came to another doorway.

"Spoke I not truth?" whined a voice at his knee; and Harald looked down on the guide.

"Aye," he said scornfully. "Hast saved thy life and earned thy hire." The fellow had spoken in fair enough English.

Then Harald rose in his stirrups, and his deep, clear voice rang through the glen as he shouted to his men to advance. At a gallop they came, thirty odd Englishmen, with the Scottish knight three spears' lengths in advance. The guardians of the herd, a score now, old men and boys, set up a direful wailing.

"Half remain outside," commanded Harald briskly. "We want not the beasts to stray. The rest in with you and drive out the steers."

It was done; the guardians were pressed—

sharply—into service ; the byres were cleared, and the shaggy, black-haired, long-horned steers turned, lowing miserably and angrily, into the ravine. It was no time for gentleness, and Highland cattle are stubborn, wayward beasts ; the spear point was the only goad to urge them in the required direction.

"A goodly herd," remarked Sir Patrick from Harald's side. "The army will not need to fast to-morrow."

"If we win back safely," rejoined Harald ; and he lent a hand in checking the headlong wandering of a steer.

Surrendering to pointed persuasion, the cattle moved towards the gap. Three hundred of them —the guide had erred on the right side—driven at the lance point, terrified, their huge horns tossing, muzzles lifted and flung skyward in protesting bellowings, with waving tails and heaving quarters, the cattle streamed lumberingly towards the gap mouth. Some broke away from the main body, and were hounded back by shouting soldiers riding on the flanks. The hitherto silent glen was filled with clamour, and the surrounding hills flung back rumbling echoes of human and bovine voices.

The guide, forgotten, crept to Harald's knee. "My wage, my hiring fee, noble sir," he whined.

"Take it."

A gold coin was spun at him, and he shrank aside. The first of the mob of steers were now passing through the gap, to be checked from spreading wide over the glen by those their

leader had stationed outside. In confused ranks, those behind prodding their fellows in front, the beasts forced their way along.

And then to the grey heavens uprose an ear-splitting scream, a yell of anger and triumph from four hundred leathern throats exerted to their utmost volume, a roar that drowned the deep shouts of the cattle-drivers and overcame even the thundering of galloping hoofs: a hideous, inhuman outburst of sound; and from both sides of the glen, for three hundred yards from the gap, but thickest near to it, came rushing in mad charge the plaided clansmen, with waving spears and brandished swords. In a chequered wave of colour they hurled themselves forward, enclosing the cattle and overwhelming the wonder-smitten drivers. Some halted or had remained still, and a flight of arrows heralded and forestalled the bursting of the twin surges on the living barrier which divided them.

The surprise was complete; the raiders were engulfed by that living tide.

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH

And a Great Fight was Fought

A MASTER mind had planned the scheme; the working out of it was perfection. The lure had been set by one to whom Harald Ulfsson could not have been unknown; the bait was such as he could not refuse; and so cunning the trap, so clever the obliteration of all appearance that one had been set, it was little wonder the quarry was deceived and fell within it. The informer did his work well; that of him who disposed the ambush could not have been done better.

An eagle's eye could not have detected the clansmen prone amid the thick heather and stones; so closely blended the colours of the plaids with those of Nature, a wayfarer across the glen would almost have trodden on the hidden warriors ere becoming aware of their presence.

That the excitable Highlanders should have remained quiet as they did with their enemies within arm's length of them until the leader judged the time was ripe for the surprise, was next door to a miracle. Still, it had happened. That it was intended to wait until the driven herd should be thoroughly in the glen must be

assumed; it could not have been foreseen that the English leader would divide his troop, and so play into the hands of the hidden adversaries. Their attention distracted, hampered by the cattle, and separated, they provided the moment for surprise when the herd was passing through the gap.

If a signal were given none heard it save those whose ears were straining for it. When it came, like red deer they flew towards their foes, avenging bodies launched by a giant hand.

Half-a-dozen men went down, transfixed by arrows; the rest scarce had their swords out ere the clansmen were hacking and stabbing at them. Escape was beyond all hope; each soldier must have known it at once. Quarter they might have had or they might not. Not a man thought of it. They were hemmed in; the maddened cattle at their backs, the no less excited Gaels at their faces. So they fought; for they were Englishmen and desperate with hopelessness.

And each man fought as he listed—or could; with grimly clenched teeth and fingers tightly gripping his weapon; fought not to save himself, since that was impossible, but with fierce intention to sell his life at its dearest worth; to slay until himself should be slain. And when men fight so, death reaps a harvest. It was point work mostly, for a swinging downward cut requires time and space. There was scant heed of guarding; with foes in front and on both sides that was useless; and as a man fell from his saddle, whether dead or alive mattered not, for he never gained his feet again.

The English fought silently, but the Gaels yelled. Their blood ran fire, and certainty of victory and the screaming efforts of their pipers quickened it to a white heat. Success had been unfriendly to them of late, and they, or some of them, had seen these raiding horsemen before. Like hounds to the killing of the wolf they leaped to slaughter; and like wolves their enemies died, biting hard, fighting to the uttermost gasp, slain but unconquered, unconquerable even by death.

And so every Saxon in the glen died; and those without, still in the gap, powerless to aid them, blocked from them by the cattle, now wholly insane, raged impotent, conscious that their own killing was but deferred. Two of them strove to pass out with the herd. They became jammed between moist, shaggy sides; kept their horses on their legs as by a miracle; and, unable to extricate themselves, were overturned at last and trampled flat by the last of the beasts. Their lives cost the Scots naught.

But ere these two were dead, those left within the ravine with their leader were already fighting. The slaying of the dozen or so in the glen was but the work of a few seconds, the assailants being a score for every one. Each was a corpse before the hindmost of the cattle were through the gap. And the blood-maddened Gaels could not wait. They were drunk with the lust of slaughter, blind to all danger, and many tried to force their way against and through the steers to reach the surviving English the more quickly. They hoisted themselves upon the beasts' broad

backs, leaping from one to the other, racing to be the first to kill; and five out of six of such impatient ones died.

But as the cattle thinned some won through the gap, and, careless how many they were, flung themselves headlong upon the soldiers.

Through the gap mouth Harald had seen the uprising and onrush of the clansmen, and he had no need of instruction of what had come. By such a host his tiny force would be licked up as a spoonful of water flung into a fire. Death was certain, unavoidable. There was but one course open to him and his—to die fighting.

But it was a death such as no brave man, and assuredly himself, would shrink from. What mattered dying since one would die as a hero? Even though victory came not hand in hand with death, there could be no repining. To fall, facing his enemies with all his wounds in the front, was the fate he had hoped would be his.

And as he thought, so did all those with him. They were Englishmen, and fear of death runs not in the blood of their race. They realized the disaster; they knew their fate and faced it valiantly. But, English like, they looked to their leader, for of all races there is none with such confidence in those set to command as the Anglo-Saxon.

Sir Patrick, by Harald's side, saw also, and his sword came out. No pitched battle could give bonnier fighting than had come of this cattle raid; and, as he had said, to fight was his business. In that moment his thoughts were far

from the Scottish crown he had put on his armour to aid his prince to win.

"All is lost," he cried to the Northumbrian.

But he said it not fearfully. His eyes were flashing, and a flame had kindled in his face. Here, too, was a man who had no dread of death.

"Nay," was the reply. "A glorious death to gain."

Then Harald's voice was raised; he shouted to his men, and they came up, sixteen of them, and set their horses in two rows, tail to tail, each man with room to strike, and Harald set himself a horse length in front of one face, and the Scottish knight in a like position before the other. Thus they waited for the yelling clansmen. Nor had they long to wait.

But ere the first stragglers reached that grim band, Fate, sternly just, gave to treachery its reward. A moving figure, urging its way like a snake amid the heather, caught the fierce eyes of Sir Patrick. It was that of the guide seeking to escape. Unnoticed, the man had crawled thirty yards since, having received his wage, he had betaken himself to the ground as the Highlanders discovered themselves, too cautious to attempt flight by running. The knight noticed the man's bare legs, and with an exclamation of rage spurred his horse towards him. He heard the coming danger, but as he leaped upright the Scot's spear ran him through the back. But neither then nor afterwards did Harald Ulfsson know that that vengeful thrust had settled the account he had with Ralph the Fowler. True

man to his master, the Norman, foiled in his earlier attempts, had schemed anew, and he died believing that Sir Robert Main-de-Fer was rid of the Englishman against whom he had such great hatred.

Grimly smiling, Sir Patrick rode back, and a cheer from the witnesses of his act of justice proclaimed approval of it.

Ringed around by their enemies, who, eager for the killing, shouldered each other aside for the glory of dealing death to the invaders, the Englishmen fought their last fight. And ever after, that ravine where they died was known to the Gael as the Pass of Slaughter. The odds were twenty to one, but the Englishmen were desperate. They were the better armed; but ten naked breasts are a coat of mail to those behind them, and men's arms grow wearied with continual striking. For each plaided man that died three living ones struggled to take his place.

As the successive waves of the incoming tide surge around an isolated rock, so the Gaels swept against their foes. They gave back momentarily, leaving a pile of corpses in front; but they came again with undiminished vigour and increasing ferocity. And the weight of numbers told, as it ever must. The physical forces of the opposing bodies were too greatly disproportionate for the end ever to be in doubt.

A great shout the English gave as the first rush was made; thereafter they fought with silent voices, save now and again when their young leader's deep-chested battle cry of "Aoi! Aoi!"

pierced through the clang of steel, the stamping of feet, the thudding of blows, and the raucous cries of the clansmen. And that great shout, hoarser with each repetition, but ever breathing unflagging courage and high spirit, was the cheer of encouragement and praise for well-done work that gladdened the ears of each soldier as he passed through the Valley of the Shadow and left all earthly things behind him.

Two great charges shook the double line and lopped a third of its strength. Sir Patrick, his gay armour gayer with red stains, his helmet split in twain, and his sword a rigid streak of crimson, gathered himself from amid the line where sheer weight of foes had hurled him, and urged his dying horse to the forefront again. It fell even as the clansmen charged afresh; but he was on his feet, though swaying unsteadily, with sword quivering aslant over his right shoulder ere the foremost of the rugged line were upon him. Twice the weapon fell, and at the second stroke it snapped. Then he was swallowed up among the press of steel-streaked tartan bodies, and vanished. And if Prince Malcolm owned a braver knight or one that died a greater death, that man was far to seek.

The third charge ended the conflict. The line broke altogether, and the fighting then was no more than the dragging down and dispatching of single men. For a while the tossing groups heaved and bent this way and that, then scattered, and the Highlanders gazed panting at the silent bodies of those who had proved so

hard to slay. For a space a silence fell upon the pass.

But only for a few moments it lasted. Then arose a fierce cry, and from a yet unbroken group near to the gap mouth, scattering men in its headlong dash like oat sheaves, broke a great horse, black in colour, with tossing head and snorting nostrils, the steed of the leader of the dead heroes, the one living remnant of the troop that had so gaily left the English camp that morning.

For Harald, alive, though streaming with blood and covered with splashes of the same from head to heel, was on the black horse's back. No other had fought more fiercely than he; no weapon than his had been more destructive; his great sword had broken when the Gaels made their first charge; the second and smaller one which he wore was of scant use in such a fray as this, and he had betaken himself to his tremendous axe. And how he had wielded that well-liked weapon those who had stood face to face with him and yet survived could have told. His sign manual was writ plain enough on the bodies of nigh a score.

The third charge had left him with Osric the outlaw beside him; wrench the two apart the clansmen might not. Then the Saxon had been stricken down, his horse with him, pinning him to the ground; and Harald knew his friend was gone. With his axe, striking more mightily than ever, he cleared a circle round him, and gazing over the ring, saw that his troop was now

destroyed. The Highlanders leaped at him again, and once more he beat them back, their wild eyes full of wonder at his superhuman might and courage, as hunters will gaze at the wounded bear that has made havoc of their dogs.

"Oich! Oich! 'Tis a second Oscar he is," they muttered in their own tongue, tribute to his valour and comeliness.

And while they gazed, Harald gathered himself for a last blow, one more strong stroke that should be fitting finish to the good fight he had made.

"Aoi! Aoi! Aoi!" he shouted, and the hills echoed to his hoarse war note. "Aoi!"

And with that, intoxicated with the wine of fight, and no more awaiting to be attacked, he charged the clansmen with axe held aloft, driving in his spurs and leaping the black steed onward as though he meant to bound straight into Valhalla.

The Highlanders gave way before him, their savage valour overwhelmed by such sublime recklessness.

Through the stumbling men the horse broke, and no man stood to meet the hovering axe stroke. Many stains of blood there were on that gallant steed's skin, but its wounds were but slight; its strength was far from spent. Scorning opposition, it drove towards the further end of the pass, and a yell from the Gaels followed it. It was fifty yards from the mouth of the gap ere the amazed lookers-on thought of pursuit. Past the byres from out which the cattle had been turned

it sped as though its heavy burden were but a tuft of thistle-down. The bit was between its teeth, and had its master's hands been on the reins at that moment, even his mighty strength had been insufficient to stay its mad career. Its own way it went; and ere the youth was aware of it he was borne beyond all danger. The clansmen might follow, but broken though the ground was, there was no redshank so light of foot that overtaking was possible.

Of no great length was the pass; and by the time Harald had hand to rein and was conscious it was to life and freedom and not the abode of heroes that he was travelling, the ravine was left behind, and he was speeding downwards through a valley to where, amid dark hills, stretched the broken outline of a loch, in the centre of which were discernible the towers of a castle. For a while he rode onward thoughtlessly; then, as his hot blood cooled, it came to him he was riding towards danger, since somewhere in front of him, beyond all doubt, must be lying the army of Macbeth.

So he turned his horse and rode off, idly choosing the right-hand, to find a way across the bleak hillside. And there a wave of sadness swept over him because he sat his horse, the life still in him, and a few miles behind, cold and helpless, there lay those with whom he had ridden and fought, the men amongst whom were those he had loved best and whom he had led to their death. But they had died gloriously; and he felt shame of himself that he had not died with them.

Almost did he find the words to reproach the means whereby he still lived. Well might his dead comrades reproach him. Yet he envied them; for to him it seemed as though they had the better part.

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH

A Highlander's Welcome

STIFF-JOINTED, and feeling as though his skin at a dozen points had become too small for him, Harald Ulfsson opened his eyes and looked around him. He was numb with cold, and when he sat up he saw naught familiar. Where he was or how he had reached there he could not know.

It was in a kind of rocky hole he lay, a cleft in the hillside, and near to the bottom, for a little below him gurgled a beck. Sword and dagger were still in his belt, but his axe had gone; and this because the axe had been made fast, according to custom, at his saddle; and when last conscious the saddle had been on his horse. Now his horse was not to be seen.

He rose awkwardly to his feet, for his limbs were painful in the bending. A keen frost had there been overnight; the rime was on his mail. But this frost had checked the bleeding of his wounds. A trickle of blood from these as he moved about drew his attention to them, and it gladdened him that none was, to his eyes, serious. Cold he was, sore, stiff and famished for want of food; but beyond such discomforts

little the worse than when he had ridden out the day earlier to gather the cattle whereof the Highlander had come into camp to give him notice.

The raid he remembered; the surprise and onslaught of the plaided, bare-limbed, yelling Gaels that had turned success into defeat and a merry foray into a hopeless slaughtering. The fight—nay, he would never forget that, the onrush of the clansmen, the shock of combat, the ringing of iron, the hacking and hewing that had left him a commander without a following. He called to mind his own last stand when, his comrades all dead about him, ringed with chequered corpses, he had meant to join them; also the mad gallop of his horse, the feeble pursuit, and the riding across the hills. And the last thing of which he had recollection was that, overcome by a sudden dizziness, he had slipped from the saddle and rested against a rock. Mayhap he had not placed his arm far enough through the bridle, and, the black horse moving onward, he had been jerked from his seat and sent rolling down the hillside. A dim consciousness he had of a swift, senseless falling, but that was all.

Staggering down to the beck, Harald drank greedily, using his helmet, from which both wings had been struck away, as a cup. Then he bathed his head and hands, and without idea or even hope whither he might be guided, started to follow the upward course of the stream.

For a while the sun shone, then it was blotted out by a pall of grey-black cloud that overspread the whole sky; a cold, gusty wind sprang up and

rain began to fall. Hardy as he was, he became chilled to the bone; the need of food, increased by his exertions, grew painful in its intensity.

For hours he wandered, seeing naught but cloud and rain, rocks and heather. The beck led him into a narrow, black ravine without outlet. He would not go back, but climbed painfully one of the stiff sides. A deep gash in his thigh began bleeding afresh, and he halted to staunch the flow with bathing of the wound in icy cold water. Then he went onward to find himself on a bare hillside, mist enwrapped, and beyond, the dark masses of other heights loftier than that on which he stood. No living creature had he seen, no sign of human habitation. It was a land more bleak and inhospitable than the savage moorlands of his native country.

Drawing his belt a couple of holes tighter, the drenched wanderer pursued his way. By now he had lost all sense of direction, there was naught to guide him; even the wind failed him, since, on the exposed ranges, it seemed to blow from all quarters at once. He travelled blindly, leaving his feet to choose their own path.

It was after midday, as he judged, that he came upon a tiny collection of rude dwellings, a clachan, as the native tongue named such, because of the remains of a Druidic temple near by. But no smoke mingled with the falling mist; the hovels were empty, deserted by their former tenants, massacred or driven hence by an invading force. Diligently Harald searched the uncouth habitations of roughly piled stones, with broken roofs of

sod and heather, but no scrap of food rewarded him. Thirty hours had passed since he had eaten, and his was a body that required much nourishment.

Up the hillside into the thick mist he went again. For hours he wandered; darkness fell, and his wearied limbs demanded rest. But his indomitable spirit drove his body onward; he stumbled at every step, slipped, yet recovered himself, until at last human flesh and bone could do no more; loss of blood and want of food overcame him. He cast himself down, struck violently against some hidden projection, rolled from it, and lapsed into unconsciousness.

It was light when he awakened, the mist had cleared and rain was falling sharply. He drew himself into a sitting position, and a wall of stones met his eyes. At the same moment a curious yet pleasing odour caught his nostrils, and he uttered a cry. It was the smell of fire, of cooking food; he rose to his feet. The wall of stones was the side of a dwelling, an inhabited dwelling; and he had, literally, fallen upon it in the darkness unwittingly.

Hand on dagger, he staggered around the wall. Were it necessary to fight a score to gain food he would do it. A sudden, fictitious strength filled his stiffened muscles. He came to a doorway, and peered within; and before a fire of much smoke and scanty flame he beheld a Highlandman, half turned round in alarm at the sudden appearance of the intruder. Food was cooking, and the scent of it mounted to Harald's brain; he became giddy.

He lurched within the hut, his dagger unsheathed. But there was no need for its use. Uttering an exclamation, the Highlander came towards him, and, seizing his left hand, laid it on his own breast. The invader had come to his home, and in accordance with that law of hospitality, part of the Gael's religion, a law never broken or unobserved whatever the circumstances, the Gael welcomed him. His creed required it; custom observed it. A Highlander's deadly enemy, claiming his hospitality, was inviolable. Neither public nor private enmity was suffered to abrogate the law. So long as the guest remained in the house, no matter what his crimes or his relations with the dweller therein, he was sacred. Nay, more, it was the duty of his host to protect him from all harm while he remained there. Nor did ever treachery abuse the law.

Beside the fire Harald was placed and food set before him—thick oaten cakes, broth in a wooden cup hot from a vessel hanging over the fire, and, these finished, meat from the same receptacle. Thanks he gave, but the Highlander was silent, merely inclining his head with a grave dignity when he spoke them. He showed no sign of curiosity; his duty it was to wait upon his guest; and when he had eaten, and incontinently dropped back asleep just where he sat, he served himself.

Strength was in his body and clearness in his mind when Harald opened his eyes. Food and rest in the warmth had restored to him his natural vigour. His wounded thigh pained him some-

what, but little other effect did he feel of the great fight and his subsequent wandering. His garments were dry ; sword and dagger still at his loosened belt. Four feet away from him near to the fire sat the Highlander, holding in his lap a harp strung with thin wires to which the Gaels gave the name of clairschach. The windowless hut was merely lighted by the glowing of the fire, and a glance at the doorway, imperfectly covered by a bullock's hide stretched upon a rude frame, told Harald that he had slept until nightfall.

The Highlander was a tall man, bigly made, of middle age, and covered with the customary garment of kilt and plaid all in one piece above a shirt. The tartan was ragged and worn, and the wearer matched it. A thick red thatch covered his head, a straggling reddish beard the greater part of his face. Arms and legs were bare. Something he said to Harald as he awakened, but the latter did not understand him. Yet one sign is understandable between men, and when Harald stretched forth his hand in token of gratitude the Highlander gripped it. He smiled as their fingers fell apart, but somewhat ruefully ; looked at his hand and muttered something. The force of his hand-gripe had been a by-word amongst his companions when Harald was at Bourne ; in such contest even Hereward himself had never been able to overmaster him.

For a while they sat, communion between them limited, and then Harald reached out towards the harp. He meant asking the Gael to play, but the latter, mistaking him, placed it in his own hands.

It was an instrument differing somewhat from that to which the Northumbrian was accustomed, and on which he was, as was usual amongst men of rank, a fair performer, yet he made shift with it, accompanying himself while he sang a Norwegian ballad of the exploits and death of that great hero, Ragnar Lodbrok. When finished, he handed the instrument back to its owner.

Then he, too, played, though he did not sing, and Harald sat entranced by the wonderful melody the Gael's fingers evoked. Plain it was he was a master of the art. A stirring air he played that made his hearer's blood to run swiftly and his muscles to twitch, and hands to clench ; a song of battle that spoke to the youth of charging warriors, of rattling spears, ringing swords and crashing axe blows, bringing the blood to his cheeks and fire into his eyes. Almost could he see the contending fighters, hear the shouts of defiance, the cheers of encouragement, the cries of those who fell. He felt drawn to joining in with the clamour that announced the winning of victory ; then the music dropped to a wailing, drawn-out, sobbing note that told of women mourning for the vanquished and the slain.

Once more he leaned forward with proffered hand, acknowledging (though less hardly than he had his gratitude) the wonderful skill and cunning of the player.

After a while they fell to talking together, the Highlander discovering that he had some English, which is to say the dialect spoken in southern Scotland, and little differing from the tongue of

the Northumbrian folk; it was little enough, but sufficient for there to be communication between the two. He praised Harald's playing of the harp, of which he confessed he had knowledge, being harp player to Ian of Glenorchy, chief of the great Clan Alpin, his own name being Dhai Ruadh or Red David. The house they were in was his own, and he had come thither from where the clan was camped to obtain a new string for his harp, one having suddenly snapped—omen of ill!—when playing the day before. He was to return to his people the next day. In his position as host, what he did not tell Harald was that courtesy forbade him to leave his guest sleeping, otherwise he would have left his dwelling early that same day.

Gratitude required some return for such frankness, and Harald explained that he was a soldier who had lost his way amid the mountains. Also he told his name.

"A soldier; aye, that I can see," the red harper answered. "And one who has been not long since fighting." He indicated Harald's wounds.

The Northumbrian assented, and quite naturally, the Gael asked with whom the fighting had taken place. Harald was prudent; too great information it seemed hazardous to give. The Clan Alpin might or might not be adherents of King Macbeth, but if they were, the acknowledgment of having been engaged in slaughtering friends of the clan might prove dangerous. Therefore he replied, and as was true, that he did not know who were his late antagonists.

Nor could he say, when asked, if there were ought in dress or badges worn to distinguish them. He believed that one who seemed to be a leader wore a great brooch in form of a boar's head on his plaid.

"Clan Diarmaid of the Boar!" cried the harper; and added a few excitable words in his native tongue.

Harald shook his head, and the question was repeated to his understanding. "What hath been the issue of the fight?"

"My comrades were slain; I am the only one alive," Harald replied sadly. "They were twenty score, mine but thirty men."

A fierce expression came into Red David's eyes; he muttered angrily to himself. Something seemed to please him ill. All at once he looked up, almost hopefully one had thought.

"Many were slain?"

"My comrades fought like heroes; for each one who died three of their foes fell."

At this answer the harper's expression changed, from anger it passed to exultation. Again he talked with himself, but this time in a higher key.

"Their chief died," supplemented Harald.

Red David looked at him as though he had not heard, and the youth repeated his words. The effect they produced was startling.

"Thou sayest—what?"

The words were shouted; the whole man betrayed an extraordinary and quite unlooked-for agitation.

"I say that he who led our enemies was slain."

"Him of the brooch?"

The Gael leaned forward, hands on thighs, the harp flung aside. His flashing eyes started from his head, and his very beard seemed to bristle.

"Aye, what then?"

So alarming was the Highlander that Harald's hand went to his dagger-hilt.

But there was no intention of attack in the man. He stared fixedly at the Northumbrian, then, rising with astonishing quickness to his full height, he gave vent to an unearthly yell, tossing his arms abroad and snapping the joints of his fingers. Harald began to think him suddenly become mad.

As quickly as he had sprung up the harper suddenly dropped again, nearer to Harald, close to whose face he thrust his own.

"Thou art sure he of the brooch is dead?" he said slowly in quavering tones. He was shaking with excitement.

"Why yes," answered Harald. "I needs must be sure since I slew him myself."

"Thou!" ejaculated Red David, and he fell back.

Then the madness came to him again, and when he became sane enough to remember his guest's ignorance of the Gaelic—which was not for a lengthy period—he made known to Harald what he had done and the reason of his own excessive joy.

The slain brooch-wearer was none other than Donacha Mhor, hereditary chief of all the septs of the great Clan Diarmaid, between whom and Clan Alpin there existed a sanguinary feud. That the leader of the enemy of his tribe was dead was

news sufficient to provoke excitement in any son of Alpin.

Then Red David began—in voluble Gaelic—a rhapsodic eulogy of the man who had performed an act of such signal service to his clan, the dead Donacha having been, seemingly, a successful and greatly feared warrior. He lauded Harald's prowess; he showered on him such compliments, all uncomprehended, that the youth's cheeks had flushed crimson could he have known what was said of him. He spoke at length; then, having heard details of the killing, he snatched up his clairschach, and in a fine frenzy, composed and sang on the spot a song illustrative of what had befallen, the indebtedness of the clan, the effect on the hated sons of Diarmaid, intermixed with allusions to Harald's personal and bodily qualities, and wonder that one so young could have performed such a feat. When exhausted, he sat down and asked to be told again of the fight.

Harald must go with him, he declared. The Clan Alpin lay no great distance away, and they must not be denied sight of the hero who had slain Donacha Mhor. He would take no denial: Harald must come; to decline was out of the question. Naught could be permitted to stand in the way of the clan expressing their praise of the man who had done such a deed.

This was kind, but disconcerting, and Harald feared that if the Clan Alpin in their capacity as foes of the Clan Diarmaid would hail him with joy, as adherents of King Macbeth, and therefore his enemies, they would be more than likely to

cut off his head. It seemed that the fact of his fighting against the Clan Diarmaid being proof also of his being a foe to the cause for which the Clan Alpin were in the field, had not occurred to the harper. The fact was evident enough according to the sober-minded Englishman, and the effect no less so; but then Harald had no knowledge of the depth and bitterness of the Highland clan feuds, more potent in the hearts of the tribesmen and their chiefs than any question affecting their king or his kingdom.

Therefore he made attempt to decline the honour, but his remonstrances were drowned in the flood of Red David's eloquence. It actually seemed as though in order to escape the perilous glory awaiting him Harald would need to slay his host.

But even such refuge vanished; for while the Highlander was yet in the middle of his assertions —he could not descend to arguments—the door of the cottage was sent tumbling inwards and four tall clansmen entered without ceremony. They glanced at Harald indifferently, then, all at once, loosed their tongues on the harper, who betrayed no annoyance at their invasion.

A harper was a man of much worth; and, as Harald was made acquainted, the chief of Clan Alpin, fearing harm had come to his valuable follower, had dispatched these clansmen to find him. To them David gave explanation of the cause of his delayed return. This required reference to Harald. Fast wagged the harper's tongue, his hand outstretched in indication of the

youth, and he, doubtful whether he might not be quickly called upon to fight for his life, saw the faces of the new-comers, turned towards him, fill with the expression of the most profound astonishment. His claim to distinction was evidently being made known.

Then the harper turned to him. Ian of Glenorchy required the return of his harper at once; there must be no delay: would he make ready to go with them?

To refuse meant to fight. Harald measured his men—a possible five antagonists, for the harper wore a sword and looked no mean adversary. He decided to accept the invitation. Chance might give to him better opportunity; and besides, he owed Red David somewhat.

The night was fine, cold, yet starlit; but to Harald it was a marvel that the Highlanders could distinguish which road they trod. Yet the two leading men showed no hesitation. Two abreast the party went, Harald and the harper together and in the centre. Perhaps it was an honourable guard the clansmen thus made; perhaps to prevent their guest from running away. But for this latter Harald had no mind.

Thus through the night they walked; and it was broad daylight when, descending a hill, they walked into an encampment of the sons of Alpin. Cries of pleasure testified to the satisfaction caused by the harper's return; at Harald men looked in silence.

A delighted man was Ian of Glenorchy that his harper had come safely back to him; an

astonished man was he when he heard what that person had to tell him. He listened with eyes fixed upon Harald, and when the harper had ended, he looked at him longer. Then he made a sign to the Englishman to approach, having no other language than the Gaelic, and, taking the youth's right hand between both of his, he pressed it warmly, offering him a hundred thousand welcomes.

A glad man was Ian McAlpin that his hated and feared enemy was dead; and he seemed little curious to know more of Harald than the harper's tongue had already told, nor did the reason of the fight with the Clan Diarmaid appear of sufficient importance to be worthy of inquiry.

With this Harald was content; for while coming down the hillside his keen eyes had detected sufficient to warn him that he was come to where lay, if not the whole, at least a great part of the army against which Earl Siward was waiting to measure strength. But, for safety's sake, the tribes composing it were stationed sufficiently far apart. Too easy communion might mean the losing of the crown while the army settled its private and personal quarrels.

Food and drink were partaken of, and then the chief, by sound of horn, brought his clansmen together. Then was the good news given to them; and Harald, though resenting being made a show of, was pointed out to them as he who had slain their foe.

But all were not glad. Jealousy, a quality

never absent from the Celt, was awakened, and mutterings passed.

"That lad slain Donacha Mhor?"

"Why, he is but a boy!"

"Who may he be? What hath a stranger to do with us and the sons of the wild boar?"

"What slew he Donacha with? A hazel twig?"

"It is likely he never slew him at all."

"He hath lied to Dhai Ruadh. Donacha is not dead. The harper would believe even a woman."

"That is plain. He believes this girl."

Thus went they on, for envy knows no bounds, and calumny grows with what it destroys. But Fate had favoured Harald Ulfsson in that he had come to a clan that had had no dealings with him and his in his forays after cattle and sheep.

Jealous and grumbling, the clansmen turned away and betook themselves to the occupying of their leisure with the preparing of food, quarrelling, and the practising of feats of strength with great stones, hurling of the bar, and leaping.

Nor was it the common men alone whose anger Harald had so unintentionally aroused. A petty chieftain, who, having spent many months a prisoner in Fife, and thereby acquired somewhat of the lowland tongue, heard with irritation Harald's account repeated to the chief, through Red David, for the third time, of Donacha Mhor's death, beckoned the youth away when he had finished, and begged his company to where the putting of the stone was taking place. No son of Alpin had been able to slay Donacha

Mhor: he had; was it possible one so strong as he must needs be could cast a stone further than the best of the clansmen?

This was said humbly; but there was more in the chieftain's mind than the putting of stones.

So a great stone was brought, a roughly rounded granite ball, and those of the Highlanders who had the greatest strength or address at the sport were bidden to cast it in turn. And when the last of them, a giant nigh to seven feet in height, had made his throw, the chieftain turned to Harald and asked of him if it were not a good cast.

"A good one indeed," Harald answered.

And he agreed not out of mere courtesy, for the man had thrown a long stride beyond the best effort of any of the others. A good fifteen paces, each of three feet, Harald judged the distance. Yet he was of opinion that had the clansman cultivated greater art in the pastime, and not trusted so entirely to the enormous strength that was evidently his, he might have done even better.

"Could'st match it?" the chieftain asked smilingly.

"That I cannot say," the Englishman answered quietly, "for I know not what it may weigh."

Again the chieftain smiled in covert mockery, and he bade a man go fetch the stone. It was brought, and Harald believed that he was to be asked to make trial of his own strength and skill. But such was not the intention.

The chieftain himself took the stone, and his followers' faces became expectant as he made

ready to cast it. Little above middle height, his shoulders were of great width, and never had Harald seen a man with longer arms. Nor were these of a size wanting proportion to their length, being stouter than those of the colossus whose put he was about to try to beat. Balancing the great stone in his right hand, he took up position for a cast, his right leg behind, his shoulder bent towards it. For a while he stood thus, tightening and loosing his great arm muscles; then with a leap he launched the ball through the air. High it flew, and fell with a heavy thud in the soft turf, wherein it embedded itself. And the faces of the Highlanders went blank with wonder. Then they recovered themselves, and shrill yells of acclamation rewarded the feat. A full stride of a long-legged man the ball lay beyond the mark of the big man.

And the chieftain turned to Harald. "Canst thou better that, great warrior?" he asked with mocking humility. The clansmen laughed.

"I will do my best," was the sober reply.

And Harald walked deliberately to where the bedded stone lay, placed his hand on it, and plucked it forth by the strength of his fingers, and his arm at full length beside him, walked back to where had stood the chieftain. And the Highlanders stood silent before the exhibition of such strength of hand-gripe. The chieftain looked less satisfied.

Then Harald made his cast. About sixteen pounds the ball weighed, a little less than that to which he had been accustomed, yet he handled it

with no over-confidence, and into his throw put forth all his strength and skill. He had made no boast; but his cast not only matched the chieftain's, but bettered it by the length of an ordinary man's foot.

"Thou hast done well," the chieftain said in a low voice.

But his followers uttered no sound; and he, turning to command one to bring the iron bar, scowled and muttered to himself in Gaelic. He had thought to shame Harald, and it was himself that had been humiliated.

Once again was a champion chosen from amid the clansmen, and Harald set himself to contend against his best attempt. The Gael did well. Yet when Harald pitched the weighty rod of iron he sent it no less than a good sixteen feet further. Very carefully the chieftain paced the distance hurled and came back smiling, the bar on his shoulder.

"'Tis not ill," he said; "yet it may, with skill, be mended."

"Maybe," the Northumbrian rejoined equably. With a greater effort he would have done better himself, he thought.

"Thus," laughed the Scot.

And with a prodigious effort he made good his vaunt, the bar falling beyond the mark where Harald had sent it. This time the yelling of the tribesmen was ear-splitting.

"Well done!" Harald cried frankly, meeting the chieftain's triumphant eyes. "I think I have ne'er seen a better throw."

Yet—for the spirit of emulation and contention was by now awakened in him—he claimed a further trial, and with more of his mind in the attempt, sent the bar a sword's length further, at which there was open muttering amongst the tribesmen and dark scowling at the too successful stranger.

Afterwards there was a bout at wrestling proposed him, and Harald consented. Yet this further attempt to belittle him proved less successful than even those previous. The chieftain did not put himself forward as his adversary, being more than content with the humiliations already sustained; and this was well, for the Englishman's opponent, though fierce as a wild cat and strong as a bull, was made to look as a child. Foiling his wild endeavours, Harald took him in his arms, squeezed him limp, and then laid him gently on the ground so that he should receive no hurt by the fall.

At this sight the chieftain's hot blood drove him beyond all control. Angered with Harald, he raged also against his own followers. In fiery Gaelic he cursed them for cowards, with hearts of water and muscles of wool. Were there not a man amongst them who could humble this stranger his wrath should fall upon them. Mad with jealousy and defeat, he would have called upon them to draw their swords but that, amongst the many attracted to where the trials of strength were taking place, he perceived Red David. Well he knew the harper's standing and influence with the chief of the clan, to whom the death of

Donacha Mhor was of more importance than the vanquishing of a few clansmen in their games; moreover, there might arise opportunity for awakening the chief's animosity against Harald. Thus he forbore; yet his jealousy would not permit him to leave unsought any means whereby this all-conquering stranger might be abased.

Restraining himself, he made shift to find compliments of Harald's prowess, flattered his achievements, and calling to one of the clansmen, gave to him a command. The man went, returning in a while, leading a horse, at sight of which Harald gave a start of surprise. For it was his own steed, from which he had become separated when his sudden dizziness sent him rolling down the hillside. Unable to find its master, the black had wandered among the hills and fallen into the hands of the very tribe whom he himself had reached.

"My horse," said the chieftain, as the animal was brought near. "We account a man a good leaper that is able to jump across his back. Thou hast been so successful. Wilt thou make trial of this feat also?"

"I will do my best," Harald answered; and he smiled, for to leap over his horse had been one of the feats wherein he had practised when at home, though in this he did not stand alone, more than one of the younger of his father's huscarles being equally proficient.

The chieftain also smiled, thinking the leap to be beyond one of Harald's weight. Following

two chosen Highlanders, the youth easily cleared the horse's broad back.

"My leapers can do even better," said the Scot. "Wilt continue against them?"

But Harald said nothing; his mind had gone from the leaping, and his brain was busy seeking to frame some plan whereby he could escape. To remain where he was, was impossible; to depart openly he feared would not be allowed him, for Ian of Glenorchy had intimated he did not wish one who had done him so great service to leave him. Escape, however, he must, and by stealth had seemed the only means open to him.

The appearance of his horse put, however, a different colour upon things. There were few horses among the Highlanders; the black was not to be matched for speed and strength; once on its back the youth had no fear of capture. The opportunity had presented itself. He was not of the mind to hesitate of snatching at it.

Meanwhile a plaid, folded many times so that it was converted into a pad nearly a foot in thickness, had been placed on the back of the horse, which, discovering its master—who would take no direct heed of it—required two men at its head to keep it in position for the leaping. The two Highlanders before engaged attempted the jump, clearing the pad without touching it, and the chieftain asked of Harald if he would leap against them. But he refused; he could do no more, he said absently. Whereat the Gael recovered somewhat of his ill-humour.

But not yet satisfied, he hoped to humble Harald still further. A pine trunk, the branches lopped, was brought forward, and the Northumbrian was asked if he could toss it. Now this was a feat new to him, and, his mind diverted from his thoughts of escape, he watched with interest the gigantic Highlander whom he had defeated with the stone, handle the caber, as the Gaels named the heavy pole.

"What does one?" the youth asked.

"Shalt see," the chieftain replied. "Art and cunning may suffice for the hurling of the ball or the bar, but this is a game to test a man's strength. Those who may toss the caber so that the great end falls at the further end from the tosser we account indeed a man."

While he was speaking, the huge clansman had raised up the tree-stem so that it stood upon its thicker end. Then he bent down and lifted it—not easily, for the weight was great—so that his fingers were beneath, the pole resting in his palms as he straightened himself, and partly kept upright by resting against his right shoulder. Thus he stood a few moments, gathering strength and obtaining true balance of the caber. Then he ran quickly forward three steps, and with a great heave from thighs, arms and body, threw his hands up towards his chest, launching the tree upwards so that it turned over in the air, to fall twenty feet in advance, the thinner end pointing towards him.

From the admiring clansmen broke tumultuous

cheering of their comrade's strength and dexterity, and he, lifting the caber, brought it towards the chieftain.

"Wilt try thy hand?" asked the latter of Harald.

And he answered: "Though this is a feat new to me, I will not hold back."

Thereupon he raised the pine stem as he had seen the Highlander, while from all those round about came the sounds of derisive mirth they did not trouble to check. Having lifted the caber, Harald—who found it not so heavy as he had expected, though awkward to hold upright—made ready to turn it, getting ready for the run, when he saw standing in front of him and seven or eight paces distant, the giant who had made the toss. To him he shouted to get out of the way, but as the man made no attempt to do so, he made a half turn, having no desire, should he succeed in tossing the trunk, that it should fall on the fellow. But when he moved, the Gael moved also, so that he still faced him and at the same distance.

Once more Harald turned, to behold the man still in equal position, whereat he cried to the chieftain to tell his follower to move. But the chieftain did but smile, which made it plain to him that by standing where he did the clansman did but make a mock of him and his effort.

"The fault is with him," Harald muttered angrily.

And he made the toss, putting into it all his strength. Forward went the caber, the heavier

end rising upward, so great the force of the jerk; and in the air it turned quite over, as it had when the Gael had exhibited his skill, and with a crash it fell to the earth.

But with the clatter mingled a cry from Harald. He had not meant to toss the tree in the direction of him in front, but to the side of him, since move the man would not; but whether it was because the strain of holding the caber aloft for so long weakened him somewhat, or that the slight turn he made gave a different direction to the object than he had intended, the sorrowful fact remained that, scorning the youth's ability to make the toss, the Highlander did not attempt to leap aside, and one end of the falling timber alighting on his head, he dropped with a cracked skull.

With a shout the clansmen ran forward; one—it was their chieftain—cried to them in Gaelic, and their intentions in such circumstances could not be expected to be pacific. It was no fault of Harald the man had died; his justification was the Scot's mocking rashness, but it was scarcely likely to prove acceptable. Nor did Harald tempt fortune. He whistled the call his horse knew so well, and it burst from the grip at its bridle. Towards it he ran, overturning the chieftain who stood in his way, and placing one hand on the saddle, leaped astride.

Men ran to seize him, but their efforts were fruitless. He had no wish to use the weapon, but he unhooked the axe still hanging at the saddle bow, prepared to strike if freedom demanded it. But there was no need. Down the

hillside drove the black horse, followed by the Highlanders' cries, and though some pursued they quickly relinquished the chase.

Three hours later Harald fell in with a party of English horsemen commanded by the youthful Siward, and was welcomed as one back from the grave.

"We thought you dead," the young man cried. "And, by Thor! when I heard how you had died I was near to weeping that I had not been with you. By St. Cuthbert! but 'twas a fight of fights!"

"How know you?" exclaimed Harald, amazed.

"Your man—Osric call you him? We came upon him yesterday. He was nigh to being dead, but he told us what had befallen, and the whole army think of you as a second Hardraade. This will be life to Osric; he seemed to have little care of living since you were gone."

Right glad was Harald to learn that his friend had come out from the battle alive; but so sorely hurt was the outlaw that he had no part with the Northumbrian in the events of the next four months.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

An Unlooked-for Blow

With the arrival of his grandson and the troops he brought with him, Earl Siward held himself strong enough to bring King Macbeth to decisive battle. In numbers, it may be, the usurper held the advantage; but in the English camp were the better armed men, the better discipline, and the greater genius of command. Moreover, while the troops of Macbeth were animated by no greater feeling than the gold of their hirer was capable of producing, there was in their adversaries a devotion to their leader combined with a genuine hatred of the Scots.

It was but a short time after Harald's return to the army that Siward and Malcolm began their march forward, when, in the words of the immortal dramatist, to the consternation of the usurper, "Birnam Wood was brought to Dunsinane," the strong castle which Macbeth had taken as his head-quarters.

With green boughs fixed in their helms, the English and their Scottish friends advanced, and Macbeth, seized by an unaccountable panic, abandoned the troops he had been at such pains

to get together, and fled to his own castle of Lumphannan in Aberdeen.

But his army made no such flight. Battle was their delight; stories of the plunder awaiting them if the English were defeated were rife amongst them; and under their own leaders they gave battle.

And well they fought that day; and Harald Ulfsson had his first experience of what means armed contention between thousands of men. The plaided Highlanders fought with the fury of men whose trade is slaughter, warfare their occupation. Undismayed by the serried ranks of mail-clad men who charged them, they fought with that furious valour and superb recklessness of death which made of the Scottish Gael so formidable an opponent. Their own headlong charge was checked; the Saxon horse rode through and through them; and though defeat came to them, they did sufficient to earn victory. Thousands fell, but they left the marks of their double-edged swords on their foes.

A desperate charge by Osberne Siwardsson broke their centre. With his son, Harald Ulfsson, and his huscarles in the front rank, the English leader broke the Gaels, and this was the turning-point of the day. But the victory was dearly gained. Down went the young Siward before a mighty sword stroke; and for a while the English were swallowed in their foemen's plaided ranks. Surrounded by enemies, Osberne died a warrior's death despite the desperate attempts of Harald to succour him. Leaping the ring of corpses that

surrounded him, a dozen clansmen tore him from the saddle ; and when Harald, with two or three beside him, dashed into and scattered the tossing group the soul of his gallant leader had fled.

This ended the battle for Harald. Dismounting, he drew forth Osberne's body, and in his own arms bore it off the field to where stood Siward and the Scottish prince. At the earl's feet he laid the dead warrior.

"Thy son, Earl," he said briefly.

"He is dead!"

The bearded face beneath the helmet with its golden wings never changed ; beneath the bushy, white eyebrows the blue eyes altered not in expression. He looked at the stalwart figure of his son, then :

"Has he all his wounds in front?" he asked.

"Aye."

"Then it is well."

Though his army was defeated and scattered, Macbeth was still free, and while he lived the new king (though it was not until the following year that Malcolm Canmore was ceremonially crowned) could not consider himself safe. Yet this work of tracing the fugitive was not that of an army, and Siward bent his energies towards the subjugation of the country, leaving Macbeth's fate in the hands of the personal adherents of the king.

Nor were the efforts of the old earl required to be rigorous. Well as the usurper had ruled during the earlier years of his reign, since the coalition against him in the south he had become

vindictive, bloodthirsty and tyrannical, and the Scottish people were ready to receive the new monarch with a hearty welcome. So Siward marched back to his own earldom, taking with him a rich booty the like whereof had never before been brought out of Scotland, and with him went Harald Ulfsson, now knight, greatly in favour with the old earl, a warrior of proved prowess, and acknowledged as leader without superior throughout the Northumbrian host. Before him smiled a pleasing future, his outlawing, of which beyond York none took account, notwithstanding.

But the bright promise never came to fruition. One evening there came hurrying into Harald's lodging a servant, telling him that Earl Siward was ill to the death, and bidding him come at once. Hurrying to the great wooden building—a hall similar to that of his own father, but of greater extent and of rude picturesqueness and splendour—Harald found the earl stretched upon a couch, a monk kneeling beside him. Gathered about the chamber were the huscarles and the chief men of the earldom, such as the hasty summons had reached. On the farther side of the bed stood Waltheof, Siward's second son, a tall youth of about Harald's age, but bigger, loftier, and with a long neck.

To him went Harald, for the two were friends, though the young lord was somewhat jealous of the other, and they stood looking down on the huge, gaunt figure.

"My father dies," whispered Waltheof.

And to Harald's eyes the fact was plain.

Siward lay motionless, except that the bony fingers were plucking weakly at the covering; his eyes were closed. To him the monk was whispering unceasingly. It was evident the end was not far off. All at once the dying man's eyes opened. He raised his head.

"I go?" he said questioningly of the monk.

"Aye," the holy man answered, "'tis so willed. And as a great man and a good man, in peace and quiet, with thy friends sorrowing near thee, and in charity——"

"As a man," interrupted the dying earl. "Sith I die it shall be as I lived; not thus, a cow's death."

Strength came back to him temporarily. Putting aside the monk, he called to his men to bring his coat of mail, his helmet, and his arms. The monk protested, but none heeded. The armour was placed upon him; Waltheof fixed on his head the gilded helmet, and his sword was girded about him. One fixed upon his left arm his rounded shield, and in his right hand Harald Ulfsson placed the ash-shafted spear. By this, disdaining other support, he held himself upright in a sitting position, the indomitable spirit of his race overcoming his weakening body. And thus he remained for nigh upon an hour, staring straight in front of him, and speaking but once, and that so low that none but Waltheof and Harald caught the words:

"As a man," the whitening lips whispered.

And as a man and a warrior Siward Digre died, facing his enemy, Death, in the same

fashion, and with the same resolution as he had faced his mortal enemies during life.

Through the length and breadth of England went the news of the death of the Earl of Northumbria; and northward, riding fast, came Tostig, younger brother of the all-powerful Harold Godwinsson. To him had Harold, intent on the strengthening of his family's power and importance, granted the earldom, alleging that Waltheof was too young to hold the government of so great a country. And Waltheof was not of that temper of mind which will atone for youth, so Tostig came to his grant without trouble.

But with the new earl rode one, Sir Robert Mainde-Fer, whose appearance meant much to Harald Ulfsson. He, crafty Norman, of strong and scheming brain, had attached himself to Tostig, and the latter, headstrong and shallow, had received him with great favour. He promised much; he could bring an army if needed; he was a skilful commander. Of such adherents Tostig had need, being in a strange land and ill received for many reasons. But for his help the Norman required guerdon. He named it to his master the day after his arrival in York, where Siward had died, and Tostig promised he should have it. Ever rich in promises was Tostig; and when the trouble of redeeming them lay with another he promised the more readily. The lands of Jarl Ulf were the guerdon the Norman asked.

At sight of Harald Sir Robert had become red with rage; he believed the youth dead, that his man had accomplished the mission. It was in the

great hall where the new earl sat receiving his chief dependents that Harald beheld his enemy, and the memory of what he had escaped in Scotland came swift to his mind. Osric was behind him, whispering prudence, but the hot Scandinavian blood overcame the listener's discretion. Straight to the Norman he strode and struck him upon the breast.

"Coward and hirer of men's deaths!" he cried in voice loud enough to be heard by all. "Wilt justify thy use of him called Ralph the Fowler?"

Men heard, but they knew naught of the meaning; they saw the blow, and they understood that readily enough. And Earl Tostig heard and saw, and he commanded the brawlers before him.

"What means this?" he demanded of Harald, hating the youth for the boldness of his spirit that had led him to act as he had, and for the independence that withheld obeisance from himself.

But Harald had learned to bend the knee to no man. He was bold because he was justified in his act.

"This man hath treacherously sought to compass my death," Harald replied, for now he had no doubt but that the suspicions Osric communicated to him were well founded. "He sent one into Scotland where I——"

"He lies," the Norman interrupted, but without haste. "Moreover, he is still outlaw according to the decree of our blessed sovereign;" he looked hard at Tostig as he spoke. "An outlaw," he repeated. "What does he here?"

There had been swords drawn then and there

Sir Robert had called Harald liar, and it was with difficulty the youth's friends dragged him away and out of the hall.

"We will sift the matter further," the earl said. "And woe to those who speak falsely. But, by the saints, never have I been so insulted before. And an outlaw! 'Tis news such have any rights."

Later there was talk between the earl and the accused man, and the latter came away looking well satisfied. The oath he had made seemed close to realization. He smiled, and one who watched for him as he came away understood the smile.

Four hours later Harald Ulfsson rode hastily out of York. With the new earl his enemy and Sir Robert Main-de-Fer high in favour, longer stay was not wise. After his leaving the hall Earl Tostig had spoken of him in such manner as promised ill; and Osric, having watched the Norman from his private talk with Tostig, had learned sufficient to make him sure enough there would be little waste of time in transforming intention into action. Even though Harald had many friends they would be unable to protect him. To match his single arm against the earl and the knight was madness.

Therefore the two left York secretly and took the westward road. In Cumberland Harald might be sure of refuge, forming, as it did, part of the kingdom of Scotland. Neither Tostig nor the Norman would feel inclined to pursue him thither, he judged. Yet he regretted he might not stay and make appeal against Sir Robert, sword to

sword, as might well have been but for his outlawing, the which the earl, as upholder of the law—when his purpose was so suited—would have made sufficient excuse for refusing.

Nor was Harald too greatly precipitous in his flight. An hour after his leaving, a dozen men-at-arms rode back from his lodging and reported to their leader the bird had flown—none knew where. Whereupon Sir Robert cursed his ill fortune, but obtained some comfort.

"Must make shift with the driving of the old dog out of his kennel," he exclaimed. "The turn of the young whelp will be later."

A week after, he rode eastwards with a strong force of soldiers, nor did he return for many days. When he did, he seemed more content, though his soldiers were lessened in number and he himself carried his left arm in a sling as though broken.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH

The Coast Raiders

THERE is hardly to be found a land so poor that a thief may not win profit from a visit to it. True, it is little to the advantage of the thief that he go where the booty is scanty, but even among those who earn a living by the robbing of others may be found application of the proverb that beggars cannot afford to be choosers. Where there is much plunder to be won, there also it is likely that a stout resistance to unlawful acquisition will be found; where riches are little plentiful the number of defenders is small also—considerations which the thief has to take into his reckoning.

This being so, the fact that the dwellers in a wretched village on the Cumberland coast were awakened in the early light of an April morning by the shouting and trampling of armed men and the firing of their dismal hovels needs little explanation. The flames drove them forth, the men with such weapons as they could find, the wailing women behind them leading their children. And without they were met by the swords and axes of the pirates, rovers from the Irish coast,

seeking slaughter and plunder wheresoever the latter might be gained without loss.

During the night the long, snake-like ship had been driven up the Solway Firth and into a creek mouth. She was beached, the sea rovers tumbled ashore, and fell upon their miserable victims.

Quickly the steel did its work. With the fury of utter hopelessness the villagers fought, but they were overmatched. Two or three of the raiders had their heads broken, but the rest slew without ruth. If a few of the women and children escaped death it was because the slayers were too eager to gather plunder to pursue them. To the moorlands at the back of the sea the fugitives fled, homeless, kinless, and with prospect of death from starvation. It was no uncommon happening; a hundred occasions, a hundred localities, bore similar witness of the descents of the sea thieves.

Upon one of these unhappy fugitives, a woman, carrying an infant on one arm and leading a small child by the hand, came Harald Ulfsson and Osric the Franklin. They had gained Cumberland unmolested and were on their way, by such roads as fancy led them, to the house of a rich chief to whom Oswald of Wharfedale had directed them. The woman caught the glint of the sun upon their helmets and armour and fled, though flight for her was scarcely possible.

"Did you see that, Osric?" the young Northumbrian cried. "This is a country where the sight of an armed man seems to bode ill."

"Where'er it be, such sight means ill for some

one," the outlaw said bitterly. "Have I not been in the same case myself?"

"Aye, but you are a man," Harald answered. "Surely the women-folk and little ones are safe always."

"Were mine?" came the retort fiercely. "The Frenchmen did not spare them."

"Well, we are not Frenchmen;" and Harald spurred his horse after the woman.

The chase was short, the woman had no strength for flight; presently she cast herself down, huddling the child beneath her, and shielding the infant with her own body. But though she saw Harald beside her, his hands empty, and speaking kindly, it was not at once she could believe he did not mean to slay her.

"Ye are not then Danes?" she exclaimed when assured no harm was meant.

"Why no," the lad replied. "What mean you?"

They gave the poor creature food, and as she ate she told them of the pirates' coming, the raid of the village and the slaughter, and Harald's eyes flashed angrily as he listened.

"Why may we not avenge these murdered people?" he cried indignantly to Osric.

The latter shrugged his shoulders. "We might were there a score of us," he replied.

"We will even do what we can then."

From the woman he learned where had been her home, and she pointed the way, adding that the raiders had gone inland in search of further plunder.

"They shall find somewhat else if they come upon us," cried Harald. "Osric, we will go to where they have left their ship."

Each with a burden, the two horsemen rode down to the ravaged village. From vantage points as they went along, men here and there spied upon them, men from neighbouring hamlets that had learned of the raid and who were ready to fly if the pirates sought their dwellings. From hiding-places other survivors showed themselves, women and children, and a couple of stricken men. These Harald questioned, but could get little out of them, so terrified were they. Leaving the horses, Harald and Osric went down the river towards the sea. Behind them a column of smoke rose high, marking where, further inland, the pirates were continuing their work.

Unseen, they lay and looked at the pirate vessel, beached, but not so high but that, the anchor removed, she would float off at high tide. Already there was a dozen feet of shallow water between her and the dry beach.

"'Twould be no ill deed and not beyond us," suddenly cried Osric, "to cut yon cable and let her drift out to sea. There will be likely but a few aboard."

"And those ashore?" queried Harald. "Wouldst turn such wolves adrift here, prisoned and desperate?"

"The folk, if they have manhood in them, will quickly dispose of them."

"Mayhap, but I have a better plan," Harald

said. "Thou and I, Osric, will to the ship, but not to send her adrift."

"What then?" and Osric looked at him in wonder.

"To take her."

"And the crew ashore?" cried the outlaw.

"We will deal with them later. And sith this plan of ours is none the better for looking at too long, we will to it at once."

So boldly, and without attempt at concealment, the two went down to the strand and waded out knee-deep to the ship. Near to sixty feet was she, with open waist, where were the oars—but a single bank—with high decks fore and aft, and a single mast. A head looked over the side of the waist as Harald came to it and in execrable Irish-Danish, demanded of him what he wanted.

"The ship," answered Harald; and with his axe he delivered a blow at the head ere the owner could withdraw it.

Then he leaped aboard, with Osric after him, and both ready for fight. And fighting they had, but not for long, since but seven men had been left aboard. Yet these, stout fighters and hand in glove with death, were by no means willing to surrender their charge lightly, wherefore, while it lasted, the fight was exceeding merry. One of the six received Osric's javelin through his breast ere they came to close range, and the first man who did so was slain by Harald's axe. Whereupon the remaining four became mad; but when in the tussle a second went down, they made ready to finish the work on the forecastle deck.

And in the retreat one cast a spear that came nigh to putting an end to Harald.

"You saved my life," exclaimed Osric, and he thrust his left arm across the neck of the stooping Harald.

The spear head gashed his naked forearm and the pirates shouted triumphantly. But the blood of the twain was now fairly up, and they leaped at the deck unheeding the swords ready to strike at their heads. Harald's helm split under a stroke, and, dizzy, he stumbled and came near to losing his feet.

"Down," he roared; and stooped, dragging Osric with him, but not out of reach of a sword point if the holder cared to lean over.

The rover did, and springing upright, Harald snatched at his wrist. His grip held, he pulled, and down came the man headlong. Nor did he move after Osric struck at him. With gaping mouths a half-dozen dismal beings, all but naked and cruelly scarred, gaunt and dirty, prisoners or slaves of the sea rovers, watched the fight. Half stupid they seemed, but the wit of one man was not yet gone. He gathered stones, part of the vessel's ballast, and flung them at the pirates, crying to his fellow unfortunates to do likewise.

"My friendship for that," shouted Harald.

Before the shower of missiles the Danes retreated, and Harald made good his footing on the deck. There the pirates met him like wolves. One slashed his shoulder as he dealt the other his death blow; and then a back-handed stroke sent the man stumbling over the edge to fall into the

waist. There the half-naked men finished him. They had no weapons, but they had hate in their hearts and a thousand cruelties to avenge. He was dying even as Osric reached him. Perhaps ten minutes had elapsed since the ship takers had first wetted their feet.

"What now, my captain?" asked Osric, binding his bleeding arm. "What wilt do with the ship now thou hast won her?"

"Naught as yet," Harald replied. "She is safe; she will not run away We will now deal with the crew."

So ashore he went, followed by the rovers' prisoners, now clad, and with the rovers' weapons in their hands and hope of retaliation in their minds. And then Harald found the women, took the stoutest of them, mounted her on Osric's horse, and bade her seek and send to him such men as she could quickly find. And the woman, who had slaughtered parents and a lover to avenge, and, like the rest, won by Harald's kindness and, mayhap, his comely face, did not hesitate.

"Tell them they come to the slaying of these wolves who will burn their homes and cut their throats if they do not the same to them," directed Harald. "And let them not delay for weapons, for I have plenty," as was the case, these having been brought from the pirates' ship.

When she had gone on her errand, Harald made his preparations. To the village from inland ran a rude track, and by this to their ship the returning raiders must come. From the village to the sea it was a short road. First from

the water edge went a stretch of brown sand, then a rolling hill of rough rocks perhaps a score feet in height, and behind that, broken ground where grew a little turf, creeping plants and coarse tussocks of wiry grass. Through this broken ground went a sunken way, once the channel of a stream, the far end losing itself in the moorland. A little northward of it was the sacked village. It was between here and the seashore that Harald meant to begin his attack on the returning raiders.

First he set the women and children to gather wood. This was carried to the beach, stacked around one side of the creek and set on fire. The smoke would be seen by the raiders, they would suspect some danger to their ship, and would thus be drawn into the net to be spread for them. While this was doing, he, Osric, and the stoutest of the men rolled or carried great stones to where the sunken way ran deepest, ready for casting upon the sea rovers as they hastened to the beach. Then he distributed the weapons brought from the ship. In these there were few to share. The lass he had sent on horseback had been told not to go far afield since time was short; the district was sparsely inhabited, and of those Harald's messenger did find, one in three, being suspicious, refused to come. At the end of two hours Harald, counting his force, found he had no more than thirty. And the pirates, so he was told, numbered half as many again.

Thus he disposed his men. Six, including two of the freed slaves, armed with bows and arrows, with Osric to command them, he placed

about the creek. Four more, similarly armed, were hidden amid the boulders of the low barrier of hills; and above the sunken way, with a few half-grown lads, and two or three of the women, who would not be denied part and assistance in the coming vengeance, he stationed six, cautioning all against showing themselves until they heard the signal he would give. The rest, armed with spear and sword, he placed in concealment between the village and the moorland.

It was a venture sufficiently desperate, nor was Harald free from apprehension that his confidence in the courage of his troops might prove misplaced. Opposed by the savage valour of the pirates, the natives might fail him, not because they lacked mere physical bravery, but by reason of the moral terror inspired by the very name and repute of their opponents. The men on whom he had most reliance were those released from the pirate vessel.

Harald's warring in Scotland had taught him that one of the chief factors in successful combat is that self-confidence which will not permit the thought of failure, and balances odds of arms and armament. An army confident in its power of victory will achieve such. Wherefore he had tried to win these Cumbrians to the belief that, did they play their parts manfully, success was assured. Moreover, knowing that other inducements have weight, he had talked of the plunder aboard the ship. That he had gained with but one man to aid him; could they not contrive to keep it seeing they were thirty?

One thing more: initial success wields an influence over those gaining it and those at whose expense it is gained, and beyond the value of the immediate advantage has another still greater. So much also Harald had learned, and he meant that in the coming conflict the first success should be at the cost of the raiders.

An hour passed, and by that time the forty-foot column of smoke on the beach must have caught the eyes of the pirates. Suspecting surprise, back they came hot foot, driving between them a number of sheep, a dozen rude carts filled with plunder, and as many prisoners, to be taken to Ireland probably, and there sold as slaves.

Down towards the creek they swept, past the village, never seeing Harald and his men forty feet away, pressed close to earth and their weapons beneath them, and so towards the sunken road. Fierce-looking, red, yellow, and tawny haired, in motley dress, but all well armed, they roared remarks and questions the one to the other; cursed the slow-moving prisoners—women chiefly—pricking them with their lances as well as the sheep, yelling at the horses, and all mighty anxious to know what meant that smoke. And not one of them had fear that, a few yards away, lurked quick-eyed, nervous foes, with hands itching for the use of six feet of steel and wood, and hearts sore afraid of the consequences following so doing. For, as yet, these Cumbrian peasants knew neither their own strength nor that of their self-elected leader.

A dozen of the rovers brought up the rear, in

front of the spoil-laden carts, springless, and bumping and groaning most horribly over the uneven track. A line a hundred and fifty feet in length the whole train made. A man stopped behind to fasten the untied thongs crossing his legs. And at that moment Harald rose to his feet, the eyes of all of his following upon him. He blew a shrill blast upon his horn, the signal for attack, and as he ran towards the surprised Dane his own men started to their feet.

Harald's axe was in his hand, and the pirate had no need to ask himself questions as to his intention. He shouted, drew his heavy sword, and stood his ground. His comrades, aroused by the sudden apparition of the armed men, stared in wonder. But not for long. With an ear-piercing scream of hate and vengeance the spear-men were upon them. These had seen the Dane go down, dead beneath a single blow, and to the instinct of killing was allied immediately a new-born confidence in the ability to exercise it. Like a furious wave they raced down upon the Danes, who, throwing themselves into a close body, replied to their yells with shouts of savage defiance. In a moment the clang of steel upon steel filled the air. And high above all again rang out Harald's horn, signal to those who lay ahead.

It was a savage fight. The Cumbrians, a third fewer than when they charged, staggered back, leaning on their spears. They had tasted fight, and they had won. Every man of the rearguard was dead or dying. But if the victors thought

their work completed they quickly learned differently. Calling upon them to follow, Harald dashed past the confused line of carts to enter the sunken road.

Here, shouting and the crashing of stones as they fell among sheep, captives and captors, told that this part of Harald's force was doing its work. The pirates were surprised, uncertain whether to go on or stay to fight. Ahead, three men had fallen, each with a couple of arrows sticking in him, and not waiting to attack the marksmen, the sea-robbers hurried to the beach. And here another flight of shafts drove them back. The road was filled with bewildered men and terrified animals. Unknowing the number of their assailants, the Danes stood for a few moments irresolute.

Then, perceiving the small number of their assailants in front, they drew themselves from out the sunken road, over the line of low hills, and ranged themselves in a close ring upon the beach. They were surprised, but not defeated; a full half of their number had fallen, but the survivors were not dismayed; though, as yet, they were unaware how numerous was the force opposed to them. Covered by their shields, each man grasping his weapon, they prepared to fight to the death if escape were hopeless. Never had they given quarter; they looked not to receive it. Nor did they fear death.

Over the hill barrier streamed the Cumbrians, flushed with success. Five had been slain when the rearguard had been attacked, and two of

Osric's men were dead; thus the opposing forces were about equal. But when the foremost of the natives saw the steel-guarded ring upon the beach they halted, and their indecision communicated itself to the rest as they came up. For the moment they were leaderless. A plunging horse had overset Harald; and, jammed in the sunken road amid wailing women, frantic sheep, and twisting carts, he was unable to free himself. Without trust in Osric, who went among them, vainly urging them to a charge, the peasants, filled with uncertainty, presented easy objects of attack.

And so thought the captain of the rovers, a tall, yellow-haired man, dressed in sea-stained scarlet, and wielding a double-bladed axe. His quick eye realized the situation; and, calling to his men, he ran forward. A brisk attack would drive away the villagers and the plunder could be taken aboard after all. With a cheer the pirates followed, furious that so slight a force should have so nearly overcome them.

At that moment appeared Harald. Another few seconds and the Cumberland men had fled, demoralized and overawed. Behind Osric, who stood his ground, gathered the half-dozen freed slaves, prepared to fight to the bitter end; the rest would have flung down their weapons and taken to their heels.

Running, Harald shouted to them to stand firm. A couple, as he reached them, he struck at with his axe-shaft, naming them cowards and threatening them. Without waiting to see if the

rest heeded him, he raised his war shout, swung his axe aloft, and rushed to the support of the franklin. Two men went down in quick succession beneath his smashing blows, one dead, the other wounded. The second, eager for blood and revenge, gathered himself from the ground, staggered to where stood one of the irresolute peasants, and passed his sword through the man's body. Immediately, as if that had been a signal, two of the wavering ones ran at the Dane and thrust their spears into his back. And this seemed to hearten the cowards, for they gripped their weapons afresh and charged upon the pirates.

Harald's onslaught was near to being too late. But one man remained by Osric's side, and as the Northumbrian reached the outlaw, a glancing blow from the axe of the sea captain hurled him sideways to the ground. Before the man could strike again Harald was bestriding his friend's body. One blow the sea robber escaped by jumping aside ; defence against a second he made by interposing his axe, and the tough wood, strengthened by metal strips, was cut asunder ; before the Northumbrian could strike again, the Dane had leaped inside his guard and thrown his great arms around Harald's middle. With all his strength he heaved, and, their balance lost, the pair rolled upon the ground. At that moment the Cumbrians fell suddenly upon the raiders. Their courage had returned, and the rush drove the Danes ten yards backward.

To their aid in the resulting *mêlée* came Harald, a dagger-thrust having slain the pirate leader ;

and across the sands staggered what was left of the raiders after five minutes' play of steel. They had seen their leader's death, and their hearts fell. Yet of those bodies that lay still on the sands all were not Danish; the grey homespun and bare heads of the peasants mingled with the gaudy colours and steel harness of the pirates. But sometimes the honest man overmatches the thief, and so it was now. The last of the sea rovers died mid-leg in the sea, and with his back against the curving sides of the ship that had been his habitation. Of wounded and living pirates there was none; the peasants had seen to that.

CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH

How Harald did Well and heard Ill

FOUR days Harald waited on the Cumberland coast. The news of his exploit reached the ears of the man within whose lands lay the scene of the pirates' cutting off, and him Harald had hard work to convince that, though he cared not a straw for the accumulated plunder of the sea thieves the vessel contained, the ship he meant to keep to himself as his right.

"By what right?" demanded the local ruler, of Scandinavian blood like himself.

"By the right of the sword," Harald answered coolly. "By the sword I won the vessel and by the sword I'll keep it."

"Alone?" sneered the owner of the shore and —as he claimed—all that came upon it. That he had been ten miles away from the taking of the ship was no concern of his.

"If need be," was the answer; "but there are two of us. The first who comes aboard without leave gets his skull cracked."

Harald intended keeping the bone of contention, having a purpose in his mind. From one of the survivors of those he had released he had learned

that Aelfgar, outlaw, and son of Leofric of Mercia, brother of Hereward and friend to himself, was in Dublin, there collecting men to take to the assistance of Griffith of Wales, with whom he had made league against Harold Godwinsson. And Harald meant offering Aelfgar his services. But to get to Dublin a ship was needed; and, having one to his hand, he felt in no humour to relinquish it at the word of a petty chief. He meant to keep the ship and find the men to sail it.

But the tale of the Danes' slaughter reached further than Harald's obstructor; it came to the ears of Malcolm's deputy, and on the fourth day a messenger rode down from Carlisle wanting to know what had been done and who had done it. Whoever he was, he was to go to Carlisle forthwith to be thanked. Harald replied—thinking of the safety of his ship, wherein he and Osric were living—that if Malcolm Canmore's representative wished to see him he must come to him.

Down came the Scot forthwith, hot to see who was this mighty talker, recognized Harald as the man whose name had been in the mouth of all Earl Siward's army when Macbeth was being brought to bay, laughed, reminded the petty landholder there was but one ruler in Cumberland, promised the ship—whereat Harald smiled—and the crew to man it. For the latter Harald gave thanks.

Thus he got himself over to Dublin, too late to meet Aelfgar, who had found his men and gone none knew whither, though some said it was on a Viking cruise on his own account, some to Norway,

and others to make a descent upon the Wessex coast. Which it was Harald could not learn; and as there was naught to keep him in Ireland, and he could not sit down and do nothing, the advantages of Aelfgar's first ascribed excursion spoke strongly to him. And he listened. The ship he had, men as wild and adventure-seeking as himself were not hard to come by; so it fell out that, somewhere toward the middle of June, the snekr's sail was set, and with fifty jolly sea-dogs aboard her, she ran out of Dublin harbour and northward up the Scottish coast. To Olafsdale had Harald set his mind upon going, and the easier way being through the English Channel, it was the other the young leader chose—not greatly to the relish of the black horse, for whom a smoother passage for its first sea-going had been better.

Nor did he regret his choice. There was some plunder gained from and much bonny fighting with the Hebridean Islanders, who, of all men, had little liking for being the objects of predatory visits, though glad enough to pay them. There were four days of hard flogging against the wind and tides of the Pentland Firth, and a run down the Scottish coast enlivened by a skirmish with a dragon ship from Norway bent on similar errand to the snekr's. Then the reaching and dropping into Whitby harbour.

And here Harald received a surprise, one that turned his mind from sea-roving, and made of him within one hour a stern-featured man with mind engrossed with a single idea.

Leaving the ship in harbour, he rowed up the

river, Osric alone with him, and went ashore by the track that led up to his father's hall. Unsuspecting, he took the well-remembered way, and had come within sight of the great carved gable ends, scarlet against the feathery background of birch-trees, when the tramp of horses' feet caught his ears. Unknowing why, he drew Osric aside into a hazel clump, and they watched three men ride by, one stout and red faced, the others soldiers cased in steel. They looked at one another.

"Frenchmen!" murmured Osric, but the whisper was heard.

"Norman guests at my father's house!" cried Harald. A half-dozen signs were eloquent of the soldiers' nationality.

And then there came by a furtive-eyed, expectant, nervous-looking man, on foot, an axe across his shoulder; and he dragged his feet as one who finds life a burden. Harald recognized the man, a thrall of his father, and called his name softly. The man stopped, looked around him with frightened eyes, and would have cried out; but ere he could do so the two had leaped upon him and Harald's hand was over his lips. Then they carried him into the hazel clump and bade him speak.

The thrall did speak, and as he listened Harald's face went grey, his lips twitched, and his hands clenched and unclenched. His father was dead! Three months earlier there had ridden into the dale a party of horsemen led by a Norman knight. Did Swend the thrall know his name?

Aye, it was Iron Hand, or some such. Why he had come Swend did not know. He had come once before, many months, and then he and his soldiers had ridden away again. There had been no fighting, but he thought the soldiers had been frightened. This time there were more soldiers; and they came late one night. And this time there had been fighting, but the soldiers had stayed.

"And my father?" Harald interrupted the thrall.

"He slew four and then he died," was the simple answer. "Many died. The fighting was going on at noon."

"Yes?"

"As I said, lord, the soldiers stayed."

"And who is at the house now?" questioned Harald after he had sat many moments in silence. "Where are my brothers?"

"They died too. Iron Hand's man, the bailiff he names himself, with the soldiers, now lives here," Swend answered.

"And Sir Robert—Iron Hand?"

"He is gone!" and the thrall shuddered. "Gods! he is a hard man and a cruel. He flogged each one of us—those that lived after the house taking—to learn where it was you were hidden. He swore you, lord, were here, and since we could not tell him, he put out the eyes of Olaf the steward and killed his wife. But for all that we could not tell him, not knowing whether indeed you were alive."

"And my father?" asked Harald again after a brief silence, his voice strained and hoarse.

"He died."

"I know. But how?"

"When the house was taken. They came upon us in the night and slew the dogs. We awakened, each to find two Frenchmen beside him. Eigh, lord——"

"But my father!" cried Harald impatiently.

"I know not how it went; we sleep not within the hall, as you know. But after, I and others were set to clean the great chamber and there was your father. His sword was in his hand and he was dead. There were four dead Frenchmen near to him, and Sir Robert's left arm was near cut through."

"And where is he now—the Norman? Here?"

"Nay, he went hence. Yester e'en the bailiff, that is he now in authority here, promised us the flaying of our bodies when his master came back from Wales because the fire from heaven had killed twenty-four cows and——"

"How many soldiers are here?"

"Two score, lord."

"Say not to a living soul I am here," commanded Harald.

And at that he got up, and went back to the river by the path he had come with a stony face and muttering lips, Osric behind him. The outlaw had said not a word during Swend's relation; silent he followed his friend into the boat, and without a word the twain went back to where lay the snekr in harbour. He had no need of speaking; he knew already.

And that night the crew of the snekr, led by Harald, grim and hard faced, went up to their leader's house, and there they did to the Frenchmen, bailiff and sleeping soldiers, that which these had done to the former occupants. They were slain every one; and from the bailiff ere he died Harald got as much news of his master as he desired. After which Harald gave his men leave to take such plunder as they cared and the Normans had not already removed, and then he fired the great house with his own hand.

To the scared hinds and thralls, who gathered about when it was known he was back again, he gave care of the sheep and beasts. They might have them for their own till he returned—if ever he did so. The only thing he took away for himself was the great sword of his father, with the walrus ivory and gold hilt, which the thrall Swend had kept, put aside, and now brought to him.

"To the Welsh coast we go," he told his men, again back on the ship.

"There is naught to be gained there," objected one.

"We go none the less. And if any man mean otherwise, let him stand forward now with his sword, and he shall get his desire," replied Harald. "To Wales we go; and when there, those who choose to follow me I will have gladly; and those who will not are welcome to stay behind. But they have not the ship, which is mine; and I burn her on the beach after we have landed. But I force no man to come with me after. Until we

reach there, however, every man will do as I bid him."

At which plain declaration the crew, being of the true sea-rovers' breed, sulked, growled, and came to grumbling so openly that Harald was forced to knock one down. After which, seeing that he meant what he said, all recovered their spirits; and when the snekr was run ashore somewhere at the back of that jutting tooth of Glamorgan known as Gower (and faithfully burned as Harald had promised), with the exception of half-a-dozen ill-natured fellows who loved thieving better than fighting, the entire crew went with Harald over the Black Mountains and into Brecknock, where Griffith, the Welsh King, was supposed to be.

And never once as they went round England did Osric say aught to his friend of what had befallen in Olafsdale. But one night the pair met on deck, and after passing each other several times Harald came towards his companion.

"My friend," he said.

And then something he saw in Osric's face kept back what it was he was about to say. But the outlaw put out his hand, and, finding Harald's, gripped it long and hard. For between these two there was no need of words; they understood without such.

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH

How Osric became Fey

A MONTH of wandering around the Welsh hills was required ere Harald Ulfsson came upon the man he sought, the man who was to help him to the meeting with Sir Robert Main-de-Fer. In a pass of the Brecknock mountains he came upon him, Aelfgar, twice outlaw, and victim of those who sought to increase England's weakness by encouraging the jealousy between the great houses of Godwin and Leofric. It was no wasted time, and no loss to England's future conqueror and ruler, that Norman knights and priests were in England and friendly with the monkish king. Smarting under injustice, the son of Leofric found outside his country the aid he could not get within. He negotiated with the Welsh king, he wedded his daughter, and he brought a fine array of adventurers, recruited in Ireland, to add to the forces his father-in-law was gathering. When numerous enough, he prepared to invade England.

This was presaged by forays and raids into the western counties; news reached the king's ears, and as it was deemed a matter not important enough for Harold Godwinsson to bestir in himself

(and there were pickings for greedy Normans to be made), a force composed largely of Normans and commanded by Ralph the Norman, the king's nephew, was sent to chastise the Welsh prince. Skirmishes between the two armies had already occurred when Harald Ulfsson marched his band of fighting men from Swansea Bay into Brecknock, but naught decisive had yet been attempted.

A hundred Welshmen with a man on horseback at their head came from one end of the pass as Harald entered it at the other. He, like a prudent leader, immediately gave order for his men to form themselves in close rank, and halted them, ready to attack or defend, and barring the road. The Welshmen halted likewise, bows were fitted to arrow strings, and the mounted man sent a soldier forward to learn who were the comers and by what right they obstructed his passage.

"Tell your leader," replied Harald, "to draw his men aside and let me pass. 'Tis he who obstructs my road, not I his."

"Who art thou that speaks so boldly?" inquired the man.

"I am Harald Nomansson, an outlaw, and therefore one whose hand is against every man."

The man went back, returning again with the message that if Harald did not leave a clear road within the counting of a hundred he and his were as good as dead.

"Maybe," was the rejoinder; "but there will be none of you to count us. We will make our road, lads, through these people. Get ready;

stay! Who is your master, soldier? We may as well know who 'tis we have to kill."

"My Lord Aelfgar of Mercia."

"The very man I am looking for," cried the Northumbrian as he dismounted; and sloping his axe over his shoulder, he walked forward with the message-bearer, greatly to the Welshman's wonder.

So the two leaders took each other's hands joyfully, their men fraternized as well as they might, seeing that the Welshmen were suspicious and the sea-rovers a trifle contemptuous; and together they went to where lay Prince Griffith of Cambria and those whom he had gathered around him.

And here, in talk with Aelfgar, who was more than a little glad to have his assistance, Harald learned that he had not journeyed into Wales in vain. With Ralph the Norman was the man he longed so ardently to meet, who had slain his father and laid violent hands on his possessions, and persistently sought for his death.

"And if I do not find that man and take my heart's vengeance upon him," he said to Osric, speaking to his friend for the first time of the great sorrow and the great purpose he cherished, "then shall you or any other man call me coward, a faint-heart, a nothing."

"Thou wilt find him," the outlaw answered sombrely. "And I, too, may find that which I have sought this long day. This is a country, I learn, where wild creatures be plentiful."

"Hast forgotten Sir Roux?" queried Harald, knowing well what was in the outlaw's mind.

"Nay. More;—the wise woman told me beside that I should die by wild beasts. 'Thou wilt lose all and gain all before thy death,' she said to me. Well, part has been fulfilled: all I had I have lost. And what is there now for me to gain but vengeance of him who caused my loss? That *is* all. And I shall not die until I have slain the Norman wolf. After that I care not. Thou I have loved, Harald Ulfsson, since the day when we sat within my cave and we were nigh to the splitting of each other's heads; but those who have gone I love even better than thee, and I have been parted with them over long."

With Aelfgar and Griffith Harald lived many months, but he would have naught to do with the raiding and burnings with which the allies annoyed the folk of the western lands. He had naught to gain as had Aelfgar; he had no enmity against his countrymen as had the Welsh prince, outlaw though he was; and to rob and slay the unhappy borderers he would not give a hand; they were not his enemies. But when there was fighting toward, when the forays led them into skirmishing with the army acting against them, then he did the work of two, for the blows he struck were against the enemies of his country. The knowledge of that cruel night's work in Olafsdale had made of him as fierce a Frenchman hater as Osric himself.

Nor was he content merely to await the chance coming of the Normans. He went to seek them, sometimes with no more than Osric, sometimes with half-a-score men at his back; nor was it

long before he became a known man to the Frenchmen. He would fall upon spying parties or those gathering provisions, and with such success that, ere long, there were no such excursions made except in strong force. Nor were these safe; and many a party, winding its way back to camp through narrow valleys or difficult passes, would find the hill-sides suddenly alive with falling stones, followed by a shower of arrows from hidden marksmen; then would come the onslaught of swordsmen and axe-men, and but one Frenchman would be left to take back news of the disaster. That one should be left alive was Harald's order to his men. And him Harald would send back with a message.

"Tell thou to Sir Robert Main-de-Fer that Harald Ulfsson awaits him," was the message.

Sometimes it would be delivered, more frequently the soldier had too great care of himself to transmit it; yet it came to the Norman's ears a sufficiency of times to keep his anger against the Northumbrian at a white heat. A bold warrior, Main-de-Fer was beyond all fear; and his purpose to slay him who had brought to him never-forgotten shame that April day in the greenwood was as steadfast as Harald's intention of avenging his father's killing.

"Will the fox never be trapped?" he would growl to himself; and would forthwith set to work to devise a scheme for luring his enemy into such a snare as that from which the latest bearer of the unvarying message had been set free.

And the next week, perhaps, from twenty miles

distant from where he had planned to catch his enemy, would stumble into camp a wounded and weary Frenchman with the warning that the said enemy was still waiting for him.

The war dragged on, and every week brought stronger proof of the unfitness of the king's nephew for his task. Instead of falling back and trying to lure Griffith from his fastnesses by promise of an open road into England, he attempted to meet the Welshman and his allies and defeat them on their own ground.

Man for man, the steel-covered French men-at-arms were immeasurably superior to the light-armed, light-clad hillmen. The latter could never have successfully withstood a single charge on suitable ground of such formidable adversaries, but such chance was withheld from the latter. Harald's counsel, backed by Aelfgar's influence, steadied and curbed the Cymric impetuosity, and naught in the shape of a pitched battle was adventured. For though the Welshmen came in to their king's support it was fitfully, and in small numbers. Time enough, advised the Northumbrian, to hazard a battle when the odds in their favour should be so overwhelmingly great that the physical superiority and discipline of their enemies would be nullified. And Griffith, though chafing with impatience, curbed his temper; and meanwhile the Frenchmen were harried and disturbed, worried and fretted, with night alarms, the cutting off of detached parties, the employment of that strategy which, in centuries to come, Owen Glendower was to use to such great advantage.

One evening, Harald and Osric found themselves, returning to their hiding-place in the hills, near to a stone-built, earth-roofed building, rude and miserable enough in appearance, but which, as was proclaimed by the thin and withered remnants of a barley sheaf fastened above the low doorway, an alehouse. It was situated in a wild spot, bare and desolate, with no other sign of human dwelling within sight; yet as the road by which it stood was the principal inlet for traffic into Herefordshire, doubtless the keeper found sufficient custom.

Osric, who had been silent almost the whole day, suddenly bestirred himself. He stopped, and pointed to the sheaf.

"Let us within and make trial of the ale," he said.

"Art thirsty?"

"Nay; not that."

"What then?"

"The ale may be good; I would try it."

Harald looked with some curiosity at his companion. "Why drink when not thirsty?" he asked. "Moreover, if the Frenchmen be about —though we have failed to come upon them— halting will be like to bring us no gain."

"We may learn there of the Frenchmen," the outlaw replied in monotonous voice, his manner absent, as though his mind were distant from the matter occupying his tongue.

"Mayhap," Harald said doubtfully. "But sith you desire to stop I will not prevent you."

"Moreover," continued Osric, in the same

curious voice, "though not thirsty, I would like to taste the savour of ale again ere I die."

At this Harald halted abruptly. "Die!" he repeated. "Wherefore should you die, Osric? Why talk of it? Art no nearer to dying to-day than yesterday, or the day before, or the one before that. What is thy meaning?"

"I dreamed of the raven last night," Osric replied.

"Hast done the same before, man."

Harald spoke cheeringly, but the heartiness was not unaffected, since he was not exempt from belief in the omens which men of all nations then held strongly. Of Osric's raven he had, too, heard before.

"What then?" he went on. "Thou said'st the same dream came twice before the day of slaughter in the Scottish glen when we went cattle raiding. Nigh to death we were, 'tis true, but thou art alive to-day."

"That was but twice," was the solemn rejoinder. "Once I dreamed of the black bird of ill omen the night before I gained friendship with you; and twice ere the Frenchmen burned home and the dear ones and sent me to the greenwood; but now I have dreamed thrice of the raven, and such is not for naught. Nay, 'tis so. So let us to the alehouse, Harald. I would not leave the world fasting. Fasten the cow behind the inn, friend, and I—stay," he faced Harald with dull eyes. "Let me go alone, get you back to our resting-place. If death be coming to me let me not help you to share it."

Then Harald's right hand gripped his shoulder, and the two looked closely at each other for several moments without speaking.

"Am I a nothing, Osric Edricsson?" the Northumbrian said reproachfully.

Then he turned aside, and leading the cow to the back of the low building, made her fast close against the wall.

The cow, a lean and sorry creature, was excuse for the appearance of Harald and his friend in the dress of drovers, the character they had assumed that they might with the less suspicion do the work that had brought them from the lurking-place of their soldiers that day. It was Harald Ulfsson's practice to set no man of his to work that it might be said he dared not do himself; therefore, to himself he, in general, allotted the perilous task of seeking that information which would lead to the drawing of the enemy into an ambush, the making of a midnight onslaught on an encampment of foragers, or the like. Many were his disguises; more than once had he penetrated into the very heart of the Norman lines; and none had ever suspected that the seeming hind, harper, or craftsman, was the daring leader whose ceaseless exertions and unlooked-for surprises wrought such great mischief. In ragged garments, his face, arms, and legs stained, his golden curls shorn and darkened, and a rough beard upon his chin, he bore no semblance to a gallant knight and gentleman.

Osric had already given orders for their entertainment when he entered the alehouse. A fire

burned sulkily, the pungent smoke clouding the room, though some found its way through a square hole left in the roof. A few rude seats lay about; the floor was of earth trampled hard and mightily uneven, and in one corner a number of sorry-looking fowls were gathered for the night, as was evidently their custom. On one of the stools sat Osric, a wooden ale-cup in his hand, and near him stood the landlord. The pair were in argument as to the guests' ability to pay for their requirements.

"He needs to see our money," cried the outlaw, as Harald came through the smoke. "Show him."

From somewhere amid his ragged clothing Harald took two farthings, and the landlord's suspicious face cleared.

"You are lucky," he observed, when Osric informed him of the sale (three days ago) of six sheep.

"We have but a cow now, she is outside," the outlaw supplemented. "We look to sell her to-morrow if we may come upon buyers."

"And where will you find them?" questioned his hearer. "Between Welshmen and the soldiers, all trade is driven hence; and I swear from neither of these may you get aught as payment except blows."

"The Frenchmen have money," replied Harald.

"But they do not give it. Ten days agone they were here. They emptied a barrel, and what was my payment? A slashed face to me, and a kick to my wife that hath lamed her since; she sat on the barrel and would not budge save for the

money. The curse of the comfortless be upon them; she can barely stir now. And the hillmen are as bad. Two pigs I had—ye can see in yon corner was their sleeping-place; and hither came four bowmen, took my pigs, cut them up before my face, and when I would have prevented them, tied me up and flogged me with their bowstrings."

Further talked the innkeeper of his several wrongs and misfortunes, and it was with trouble Harald could bring him back to other things, and get from him what he desired to know—whether a party of Norman horse, of which he had had information, had been seen from the inn lately. At last it came out. Yes, they had, only that same morning, and the man hoped he might never see them again.

To either guest, the money being paid in advance, was given such food as the inn could provide—wooden bowls full of kid's flesh and the broth in which it had been stewed, with a thickening of onions, tender and palatable enough, together with great hunches of lately baked bread. The quantity was generous, and, a good trencherman, Harald had no distaste to the matter in hand. But Osric supped soberly, as though the performance were a duty rather than aught wherein he took a hungry man's true pleasure; and it was sufficiently evident the thrice-repeated dream was weighing heavily upon his mind.

The meal was nigh to being concluded when Harald paused suddenly, drinking vessel to his lips.

"Did you hear?" he asked.

"What?"

"The tramp of horses." And then Harald drank. "Frenchmen. We were best out of this. But we will finish our supper first. And they may ride past."

"They will come here."

Osric had stood up; he seemed to be listening, yet was not; he was staring fixedly through the smoke, and yet scarce as one looking at aught of definite shape. Harald eyed him in wonder and alarm.

"What see you?" he cried half fearfully.

"Myself."

Then he stooped towards Harald, and the latter saw that a wondrous change had come into his face. The blackness had departed from it, the dullness had left his eyes; he had become cheerful once more. And he began to speak quickly.

"They bring my death with them"—he was referring to the approaching soldiers. "They will come here, but they will not know us. Yet there will be fighting, and I shall die. How, I do not know, for that the wise woman spoke truth I am assured. But they bring my death with them. Let us not go, Harald. Thou art safe; no harm will come to thee. But I saw myself dead—and I died in happiness."

The man was labouring under some strange excitement; his hands trembled, a light was quivering in his restless eyes, and the habitual fierceness had gone from his face. He spoke as one repeating something that he had learned by

heart. And Harald, knowing that strange gifts are sometimes given to men when they are fey, uttered no word of denial or remonstrance. But he felt within his clothes for the weapons that were hidden there—a short-handled axe and a heavy dagger.

A few moments later a loud noise without the inn spoke of the arrival of the mounted men; harsh voices mingled with the jingle of harness and the stamping of horse hoofs, the door was beaten inwards, and a man-at-arms stalked into the room.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST

And the Prophecy was Fulfilled

SWEARING and coughing, the Frenchman came through the smoke and called loudly for some one to appear, not seeing the two inmates of the chamber. Presently the landlord came forth, and answered the insolent foreigner's questions with a humility that said much for his previous dealings with the breed.

It appeared that the troop had lost its way, and such information as the soldier was able to extract he went out to communicate to the leader.

"What saith the hog? Twelve miles!" the listeners heard the latter cry irritably. "Then let him find drink for ye, my men, before we go further."

Against the wall where they sat, Harald felt his companion's fingers lay sudden grip of his thigh.

The leader's command seemed one to the liking of the soldiers. They dismounted, and stamped into the alehouse noisily. They caught sight of the Englishmen, and a jeer and a laugh, evidently at the latter's expense, passed round. Their demand was quickly given to the innkeeper, and when he asked what payment he was to

receive, the question was met with a roar of laughter.

"Payment," shouted one; "why, we will forbear to slit thy ears and nose, the which thou dost deserve, being a thieving innkeeper and an Englishman to boot. Bring out thy muddy ale, villain; and think us gracious that we do not beat thee for selling such vile liquor in place of good wine."

The ale was brought, but a difficulty arose; the soldiers numbered a score, the wooden cups at the landlord's disposal were not a dozen. The trembling server explained this.

"What; here is another," cried one of the unwelcome guests.

He stood nearest to Harald, and had seen the measure the latter held. Without warning, the man-at-arms came forward to take the cup from Harald's grasp. That he could not wrench it free angered him greatly, and surprised him the more. Roaring an oath, he put both hands to the cup, set his feet firmly, and tugged.

"Pull harder, Frenchman," laughed Harald.

By one hand he held the vessel, his fingers within, the thumb without, and his gripe held fast.

"Wilt not give it me?" shouted the soldier angrily.

"Shalt have it if thou canst take it," was the reply.

And the Frenchman tried again. His comrades, interested in the trial of strength, gathered round, encouraging their countryman and shouting

insulting epithets to his opponent. Beside Harald Osric remained quite quiet.

"He is a strong villain," cried one of the soldiers. "You have met your match, Denis."

"Not I," grunted the soldier.

A curious sight it was. The fire flame had gained mastery of the smoke, and its bright glare lighted up the helmed faces of the soldiers bent eagerly towards the wooden cup at which their comrade was straining with both hands. But Harald, his back against the wall, his feet stretched forward and muscles tense, resisted successfully. The soldier had the advantage, being standing, but he could not even shift the strong Northumbrian. His broad palms encircling the cup, he wrenched and twisted, but all in vain.

"Let us go out; our work lies outside," Osric suddenly whispered in his friend's ear. His tone was impatient.

And Harald's fingers were loosening their gripe when the soldier released his hold.

"I will loose his hands," he cried, with an angry oath, and out flashed the dagger from his right side.

His purpose was plain, but ere it could be executed, Harald stood upright. What might be Osric's object in calling him outside he knew not, but he was willing to humour it. A man fey, as he saw plainly was Osric, was not to be withstood. As he came to his height his left hand fell upon the Norman's wrist even as the dagger point cleared the sheath; his fingers tightened over the limb, and he slowly twisted it round until, with a

yell of pain and rage, the man relaxed his hold, and the weapon fell to the floor.

"Now thou may'st have the cup," the young man said; and bringing it between his two hands, he pressed on it until the pieces of wood were forced inwards from their fastenings to the encircling hoops. Dropping the crushed and useless vessel upon the floor, Harald moved forward, and the ring of wonder-stricken soldiers silently gave way to him. None made an effort to stop him, but their eyes followed him as, Osric at his shoulder, he stalked out of the inn. Then their tongues wagged, but softly; and not one went after him.

It was evening, but not yet dark, and along the road a few yards away the Norman leader was slowly walking his horse. Join his men in the alehouse he could not, but he would not withhold from them opportunity for refreshment. Towards him went Osric, and Harald, wondering, went after. His friend's curious words, forgotten at the moment, came back to his mind.

"What——" he began questioningly, but an uplifted hand stayed him.

"Sir Roux d'Assobert." The words were whispered.

Then Harald understood. Osric had recognized the knight's voice at the inn doorway, and was eager for the taking of his vengeance. His purpose was clear; one glance at his face assured Harald of so much. Also he seemed satisfied. Without haste or impatience he went forward to do

that which he knew now was to be the precursor of his own death.

Thirty yards distant from the alehouse the Norman knight turned his horse, and at the same time became aware of the two figures coming near to him. That their purpose could be harmful, they, two English dogs, was beyond his imagining. That the one came directly in the path of his war-horse annoyed him.

"Art blind, fool?" he cried in French.

But Osric was far from being so. He held on his way, and as he would not avoid him, the knight had no other course but to ride him down. That he was facing the man whose home he had desolated and loved ones murdered never entered his head.

But Osric was not ridden down. As the charger reached him he stepped aside, and his hand went to the rein, and the horse stopped.

"Stand aside," the Norman cried threateningly; but even now he could not conceive himself object of attack, so great his contempt of the islanders.

To his knee came the outlaw, his eyes glittering, and stretching out his leg, the knight kicked him in the body, his left hand going to his dagger hilt.

"Dost know me, Frenchman?" the Saxon asked softly.

And ere the other could guess his intention his hand gripped Sir Roux's arm. The strength of a dozen men was in the outlaw then, and with a sudden wrench he dragged the knight headlong from the saddle. The falling man uttered a cry,

but it was stifled; Osric's other hand was placed across his mouth, and Harald's strong arm caught his body.

They carried him, struggling, to the edge of the track and laid him upon his back; and there Harald turned aside. Osric, his knee on his enemy's chest, one hand at his throat, and the other clutching the dagger that had been concealed beneath his clothes, was speaking softly to his prisoner.

Within a few moments, Harald, whose eyes had been turned to the alehouse, was joined by the outlaw. There was no need to ask if his vengeance were completed.

"My death is certain, but thy life, Harald, must be saved," Osric said. "Let us to the alehouse roof. When the Frenchmen come out and seek us they will ne'er think to look there."

He moved towards the inn, and Harald, in curious obedience to one who had become different from other men, and who had been permitted to see into the future, followed him. Darkness was falling, and Osric's desire might secure their safety better than immediate flight.

But the fates had ordered otherwise. For they were yet within ten yards of the alehouse, when the first of the issuing men-at-arms came forth. At sight of them, and without a word, Osric left the road and began to run like a hare over the straight grass-land to the right of it. Harald followed his example; nor may one deem him faint-hearted that, as he ran, he wished it was to the four stout limbs of his strong black steed that

he was trusting rather than to his own legs. What capture would mean he knew too well.

There was an exclamation, a shout, as the Frenchmen came from the alehouse door. The riderless horse in the road caught their eyes, and the dusk did not hide from them the motionless figure of the knight beside the road. Oaths and shouts rang out; one or two ran towards their slain leader, a few set off in pursuit of the fugitives; others with greater reason unloosed and mounted their horses.

Then began the pursuit, and well it was for those who fled that wind and limb were sound and strong. For a quarter of a mile the course lay over flat ground, bare and uncultivated, and the pursuers gained fast. The pursued were fleet of foot, they were unencumbered, but human limbs may not successfully compete against those of a horse over a great distance. Before the two Englishmen had done more than reach the rising ground at the base of the hill, that ran parallel with the road they had just left, the foremost of the mounted men-at-arms was upon them.

"Save thyself," cried Osric, and halting, he turned to face the soldier.

He was assured that death was not far distant from him; he was confident it would be wrought through the agency of this band of Frenchmen; it was folly that he should attempt to avoid it. The strange glimpse into the future permitted to him—as he truly believed—when in the alehouse had composed, not unsettled, his mind. The dream of the raven had been a warning; it had

been confirmed when, in the momentary trance that had come upon him, he had beheld himself dead; his fate had arrived, and he knew it foolish to seek to avoid it. But Harald was not to die; therefore he called upon the young man to save himself.

But of flight when a friend and countryman was in distress the Northumbrian was incapable. Moreover, he was as strongly affected by Osric's prophetic utterance as the man himself.

"Sith I am not to die I shall not," he replied, and out came axe and dagger. Were there fighting to be done he would not shirk it.

Full upon them as they stood side by side thundered the Frenchman, his sword uplifted. Each leaped aside, Harald striking at the horse's forelegs. Down went the poor brute, falling a few yards forward as it stumbled; and there was a clang of metal as Harald's axe fell upon the rider's helm. From striking the blow he turned to the aid of Osric, engaged with a second opponent.

Behind, from one or other of the oncoming men-at-arms, rose contradictory shouts. "Hew them in pieces! Cut them down! No, no; take them alive! They must be taken alive."

A second Frenchman fell, unable to defend both sides at once, his armour a frail protection against the swift and heavy strokes that fell upon him. Harald was about to mount his horse in his place when there was a sudden shock, a heavy body struck against him, and he was hurled five yards away. Half-dazed he was, and before he could

recover himself, half-a-dozen men flung themselves upon him and tore the weapons from his hands. He had been ridden down from behind.

Though unarmed he continued to resist desperately. The promise of his fated friend was forgotten; death was near, and he fought against it. A dozen times had he died had the men about him used point or edge. But they did not; the recommendation or order to take him alive was complied with. Once he gained his feet only to be pulled down again as hounds drag down a fighting wolf. He reached his knees, his hands gripping a soldier's belt, and then a severe blow from the flat of a sword-blade alighted on the side of his unprotected head, and he rolled over.

When he recovered his senses it was to find his arms bound firmly together, though his legs were free. A few yards away lay the outlaw, similarly treated. Near by stood the Frenchmen, talking together. So much Harald saw, though indistinctly, for now it was darkness all around, and before his eyes all things were blurred.

Presently the prisoners were jerked to their feet, a rope was made fast to their arms, and the other end to the saddles of a couple of the soldiers. Osric was on the one horse's near side, Harald at the off side of the other; thus they were brought shoulder to shoulder as their captors rode abreast. At a trot the troop set forward, the prisoners being thus forced to run briskly to avoid being thrown down and dragged by the retaining ropes. At the rear, led by the bridle, was the horse of the dead leader with the corpse bound

firmly to the saddle. Onward into the gathering blackness of the night they rode, the unfortunate prisoners now colliding with one another, now with the iron knees and feet of the riders to whom they were fastened, and the ropes wrenching at their chafed and bleeding arms as the horses swayed and plunged over the uneven ground.

For three or four miles they travelled thus; then the horses were drawn into a walk, and it became evident from the words that passed between the soldiers that there existed difference of opinion as to the direction they were taking. The discussion quickly became warm argument, and the troop halted for the better contention of the question as to whether they should strike off to right or left hand of their present route. With raised voices and many oaths the point was debated; and, as is customary in like contingencies, those who shouted the loudest and the most arrogantly gained the day.

And as again happens most frequently, the loud-voiced ones proved to be wrong ere another three miles had been covered. The ground—road they could see none—became more and more steep; the open land at the side gave place here and there to jutting spurs of cliff, and great stones cumbered the surface. At a walking pace they were forced to go, and the voices of grumbling men mingled with the clank of iron-shod hoofs.

The air became more keen; a harsh, strong wind arose, and great drops of rain fell, precursors of a squall that speedily became a heavy downpour. Loud and deep sounded the grumblings

and curses, against those who were leading all astray, the weather, and the prisoners, but for whom the men would not have been led into their present plight.

"The knight knew the backward road and these dogs have slain him," shouted a fierce voice. "Let us cut their throats."

"That will not find us our way," retorted one who seemed to have some authority, and was chiefly responsible for the direction which had been taken.

"'Twould be their due," protested a third.

"Aye; but we must keep them, for, if I have made no mistake, one of them is he for whom Main-de-Fer hath offered five marks."

Growling followed this; and then from the back three or four cried they would go no farther. They should be going down-hill, not up; they had been led wrongly.

Once more they halted and a consultation took place. Some were for going on, others turning back; a few would say naught except to disagree with all other speakers.

And then the moon shone out dimly from the edge of a huge ragged mass of rain-cloud, and showed them a bare, black hillside on one side of a wide, broken valley, and on the other the cloud-hidden summit of a ragged line of cliff. The moon vanished, and through the darkness came the wind, driving the cold rain, and howling through the valley with a force that threatened to sweep all before it.

On they went again, aimlessly and at a snail's

pace, the wretched prisoners bumped and bruised at every movement, often losing their foothold and being brought up with a jerk of the rope. If it was bad for the soldiers, trebly so was it for them. Between them no word had passed since their capture.

Suddenly, close behind him, Harald heard a sound like a quick intake of breath; it was followed by a sharp "Ha!" and fingers clutched at his arm.

"Did you not hear it?" cried Osric's voice.

But Harald could hear naught save the howling of the wind and the profane growlings of the men-at-arms.

Unevenly the horsemen straggled along, and Harald and Osric were dragged apart. But the latter cried his question again, and Harald, though he could not distinguish any sound save those about him, listened intently; for in the outlaw's voice was a strange note, the note that creeps into a man's speech when he talks of something for which he has long waited and now knows is near to him. It was neither gladness, nor fear, nor surprise the man's voice held, yet it moved the hearer to a sense of painful expectation.

All at once the Northumbrian started, a thrill ran through his strong muscles. He, too, heard, or thought he heard, somewhat, a sound borne on the wings of the wind, mingling with it, yet unlike it. And he had not stumbled ten further steps before he knew that he was not mistaken, and that he recognized the eerie, vibrating call. It

was the cry of a wolf, of many wolves; during the winter in Scotland he had heard it too often to be now at fault.

Nor were the Norman soldiers long behind Harald in catching the fear-inspiring sound. They knew the cry of the wolf. Suddenly one of the foremost of the riders reined in with a cry.

"Wolves!" he shouted.

The horses huddled together while their riders listened, and the two prisoners in the middle came nigh to being crushed. It was a danger unthought of, though not unknown to the natives. A hundred years before, so plentiful had been the wolves in Wales that tradition had it Edgar, King of England, had fixed the tribute of the conquered Welshmen at three hundred wolves' heads; and not until many years after the Norman Conquest was the creature extinct in England. Many were the tales the hill-dwellers in Brecknock and Montgomery could have told of the fierce brutes' depredations, of flocks destroyed, of travellers attacked and killed; but of such the Frenchmen had no knowledge. Now that the presence of the beasts was made known to them they were at first astounded, then filled with a sudden terror. The outcoming of the moon showed their faces pale and panic-stricken. The wolves might be a couple; there might be hundreds. Imagination augmented their fears. They stood chattering, no man giving answer to what another said, but all talking at once. They were irresolute, uncertain. All sense of direction was lost; they knew not where they were; the darkness en-

veloped them; and they were without a leader. At such moments men have all the timorousness of children.

More plainly sounded the howling of the wolves: evidently they were drawing nearer. And then the sky was rent and torn asunder by a jagged flash of blue light, the first levin bolt of the threatened storm, and ears were deafened by the crashing roll of thunder that followed. A panic fear seized the war-worn men-at-arms; they were no better than a flock of sheep, and as such they acted. With a sudden shout, one man drove in his spurs and urged his horse recklessly back along the way they had come. And the rest followed his example. The prisoners were forgotten until the riders to whom they were fastened felt the sudden dragging of their weight; and then daggers were whipped out, the ropes severed, and without a thought as to what the fate of them might be, the soldiers followed their frenzied comrades' mad rush into the night.

Bruised and torn, Harald Ulfsson gathered himself from the ground. He shouted, and an answering cry reached his ears. A flash of lightning revealed the two friends to each other.

"The wise woman spoke truth," came Osric's voice through the darkness. "Hark!"

And now that the thunder echoes had ceased could be heard the horror-inspiring howling of the wolves; they were sweeping along the valley.

"What said I?" continued the outlaw. "Have not the Frenchmen brought me death? But

thou, Harald, wilt be saved. And I shall die willingly. If I have lost all, I have also gained all, for I have slain my foe, and I am content."

A scream rent the air, overcoming the falling wind, a loud crashing was heard from some distance ahead, and then a second scream, the cry of a horse in agony.

"If I die it shall be fighting," muttered Harald, and he ran forward to where had sounded the crash. He judged that one of the flying Normans had come down.

And then the storm ceased as suddenly as it had commenced; the moon shone forth, illumining the wide valley and showing Harald Ulfsson bending over a dark form lying on the ground, and twenty yards away, Osric the Franklin, his arms bound, facing the head of the valley along which were galloping the wolves.

Six hours later, a band of Welsh spearmen came into the valley, and as their scent was carried by the wind, a dozen lithe, grey creatures stole swiftly with fearsome snarlings from around a rock, an isolated mass of granite, and sped silently away. On the upper part of the great boulder, a rough table-top some six feet square, crouched a man with a sword in his hand, red from guard to point. His bare arms were torn and bleeding, blood-splashes covered him, and beside him lay a human body, cold and stiffening.

The living man was Harald Ulfsson, the dead, Osric the Franklin.

A dozen yards from the rock lay the bones of a horse, its fore-legs broken, and around a few torn

and gory trappings. Beyond that, with the neck-bone snapped, was that which had once been a mail-clad soldier with a Norman helmet on the head. From the scabbard beside it the blade was missing.

What had passed during the long hours of that dreadful night it was not difficult to conjecture. That the prophecy of the wise woman had been fulfilled to the letter was evident, for on Osric's naked throat were the marks of many sharp teeth. The outlaw's premonition had proved true; he had not dreamt thrice of the raven for naught.

Harald, returning from the taking of the sword from the dead soldier, had found his old comrade on the ground beset by the fierce beasts of prey. With the body over one arm he had contrived to climb the rock, and there he had passed the night, repelling the attack of the wolves. That these had been unwilling to lose their prey, and that Harald had not taken his weapon for naught, the carcases of the nine fierce brutes around the base of the rock bore witness.

The details of that ghastly fight, the horror of the long hours under the moonlight with the slavering, bloodthirsty animals leaping from six feet below to complete their terrible work, must be left to the imagination.

From the rock the spearmen assisted Harald, still a sane, though exhausted, man. But from then henceforward the Northumbrian could never behold a wolf without shuddering, and few that he saw but he made attempt to kill.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND

How Harald missed his Cast

THEY carried dead Osric to the top of a steep hill and there buried him, with his weapons beside him, and the men who followed Harald Ulfsson helped to pile a great cairn above his grave. And in silent sorrow for the man who had been to him close as a brother, Harald went about his work, counting himself charged with a further debt against the hated Frenchmen.

Nor was he forgotten by his enemy. The survivors of Sir Roux d'Assobert's troop found their way, when daylight came, to where the army was camped, and there told their tale. Later, the capture of the dead knight's wandering horse confirmed their story. One of the party, with greater zeal than discretion, voiced his belief that those who had slain Sir Roux were the men whose cunning traps and bold artifices had wrought such harm and rendered so perilous all scouting or foraging expeditions. The words reached the ears of Robert Main-de-Fer, and he sent for the soldier, and questioned him.

"Thou had'st the churl in thy hands and let him go again?" he shouted when satisfied that

the drover in the alehouse was none other than Harald Ulfsson.

The stout man-at-arms quailed. He tremblingly explained that, but for the losing of their way and the coming of the wolves, the two prisoners would surely have been brought in. But the angry knight cut him short.

"Am I to be for ever tricked and defied by this English hound?" he cried furiously. "Is he to escape me every time? The road lost! Wolves! Are ye children to be frightened of the dark? Cowards to be terrified because a wolf howls? By the splendour of heaven, one would think this Ulfsson the evil one himself that all go in fear of him."

The man-at-arms reminded him that Harald had actually been captured; but for the order to carry him into camp alive he would indubitably have come to his end.

"Get hence," stormed Main-de-Fer. "Since I can entrust my work to no one with hope of its being done I must do it myself."

And to that he set himself, but with no greater meed of success than his subordinates. With a hundred men behind him he rode into the hills, found the alehouse where Sir Roux's soldiers had come upon Harald, hanged the unhappy keeper from a pole set above his own lintel, and fired the dwelling. To the lamed woman, widowed and homeless, driven weeping into the stormy night, he never gave a single thought.

But from the innkeeper ere he died he learned naught of Harald or his whereabouts. The

wretched man had not known who were his guests. So the Norman rode to seek elsewhere. But in the early morning came Harald himself and a score of the Irish-Danes to the ruins of the inn. It was Frenchmen's work, so all agreed, work demanding vengeance, and as there had been no rain overnight, a pair of bloodhounds, Aelfgar's gift to his friend, were put upon the trail of the departed horsemen. In late afternoon the quarry was sighted, and kept in view until nightfall, when the horses were picketed, fires lighted, and a small tent set up for the leader, the soldiers making themselves comfortable as they could under the lee of the high ground.

When the fires had burned low and the men-at-arms in their first sleep, Harald and his rovers came down the hillside like ghosts and burst upon the camp. The nearest sentinel was brained ere he had the chance to give the alarm ; two men rushed to where were the horses, slashing through the ropes and freeing the startled animals, while the rest, led by Harald, who went straight for the white tent, fell upon the half-awakened soldiers.

The cries of the wounded men, the angry shouts of the living as they sprang to their arms, the clanging of steel, and the joyous cheering of the attackers as they struck, and struck, and struck again, broke upon the stillness of the night in hideous combination. But within a few minutes the conflict ceased. The hoarse call of their leader's horn withdrew the assailing party ; they slipped through the confusion and were swallowed

up in the shadows of the night, to be joined by Harald and the two whom he had kept near him.

"Give me hand to bear away our prize," cried the Northumbrian, and he shot from his shoulders the body of a burly, helmeted, mail-clad form he had borne from the camp. "'Tis the leader himself, and he must not be lost."

So the inanimate body was dragged up the side of a rocky ridge and beyond it ere the bewildered Frenchmen below had their wits sufficiently about them to think of pursuit—which, not knowing how numerous were their enemies, they did not attempt. And when Harald judged there was leisure for the purpose, he gave attention to his prisoner.

Recognizing the pennon of his deadly enemy when first the Frenchmen were sighted, he had decided to make the effort to capture him. The strength of his desire for revenge was too overpowering for him to agree to greater delay than until nightfall; wait until he had collected a strong force he would not; hence the swoop upon the camp, a dash in which his men had followed him readily enough. Fierce and superstitious, these war dogs loved their leader with a devotion, intense and whole-hearted, that was ever accorded by the Northmen to one of superlative bravery and proved good luck. From Osric had they heard somewhat of his exploits in Scotland; their own eyes had been witnesses of his quality as a fighter and a leader; they would have followed him anywhere. He had won alike their respect

and their love. Pirates they would have been had not Harald's mind been turned from sea roving; soldiers they were because he had become soldier. Kith and kin in feeling and spirit to the men Harald had helped destroy on the Cumberland sands, and of a certainty no better than these, caring little for aught save a life of turbulence and riotous jollity, and looking forward to a fighting death, they were the very men to be inspired to attachment to such an one as Harald Ulfsson. Not a man of them but would have cheerfully given his life for his leader. He ruled their wild and fierce wills, and they gave him in return the attachment a fierce dog has for him who is recognized as its master.

The capture of the prisoner had been quickly accomplished. As Harald reached the tent, the armed man came forth, sword in hand. Two blows were struck; the second broke the Norman's sword and dashed him senseless to the ground. Lifting him to his shoulder, and preceded by his two men, Harald had broken his way out of the scene of turmoil and confusion. His intention accomplished, he had given no time for the smallness of his force to be recognized; with Main-de-Fer a prisoner sufficient had been done.

But when, a secure hiding-place reached, there came examination of the prisoner, a surprise awaited Harald. Turning from the fire whereat sat his men, eating, talking noisily, and binding up such wounds as had been received, he picked up the now conscious Norman and carried him to within the fire-light, for it to reveal to him that he

had not captured his enemy, but a younger man, broad faced, and dark of skin, no common soldier certainly, but as certainly not he whom Harald had supposed.

"Who are you?" he cried.

There was no answer The young Norman's lip curled, and he scowled into the face bent above his.

"Who are you?" demanded Harald again with vexation.

From Robert Main-de-Fer's tent had come this prisoner, and assured of his identity, recognizing the bulk of him, and his movements being of necessity hurried, Harald had not looked too closely at the face of the man he had attacked and so summarily disposed of. It was an annoying mistake, but not to be helped.

The second time he asked the question he spoke in French and an expression of surprise came into the prisoner's eyes.

"I speak not with shackled hands," he replied proudly.

"Tied hands need not tie the tongue also."

Nevertheless Harald cut the young man's bonds and he sat up, staring about him curiously. Finally:

"Who art thou?" he asked.

"My question of you. I am named Harald Ulfsson, and I took you for Robert Main-de-Fer, but it seems I was mistaken."

"Thou art Ulfsson?" the Norman cried. "My uncle——"

"Would be better pleased to see me than you

are," interrupted the Northumbrian. "I doubt it not. He is your uncle? And I would rather have him before me than you. How came it that I saw his banner?"

"He was there," answered the Norman, "but without the tent; he left it for some purpose. I am his nephew and squire, and sleep with him. I would he had met thee this night," he added viciously.

"Then he would be here instead of you; be comforted. And think now what I may do with you! What would your uncle do were I his prisoner?"

"Hang thee," came the quick answer. "He has sworn to do so."

"It is good of him. And what were his prisoner one of my men?"

"Hang him."

"And wherefore should I be behind your relation in courtesy? But were it Robert Main-de-Fer here before me instead of you I should not hang him. Nay, I should give to him his sword, take me to mine, and could he win life by slaying me he should. But he would not slay me. Still, I do not murder my prisoners; you shall have life without the trouble of fighting for it."

The squire looked at him with incredulous eyes then he turned his head aside.

"An Englishman, and an outlaw! Who would believe him?" he growled. "Besides, I take not my life thus."

"By Odin!" cried Harald, yet he smiled, for the Norman's petulance and boldness amused

him. "You are hard to satisfy, young sir. Are you so greatly in need of a cut throat? You will not accept your life, nor fight for it; we shall have to leave you here to get on as best you may, for take you with us we cannot."

"I will fight with you," at last the squire said sullenly. "But remember, I asked not for mercy."

"Aye, if that will satisfy your nice honour," the Englishman laughed. "But you will not fight with me—I might strike too hard. Ord," he called across the fire to one of his band, "wilt fight this French cockerel for his life?"

There was a laugh went up; and Ord, a lithely-built young Dane, the smallest man there, yet a good fighter for all that his eyes held a squint, sprang up nimbly.

"Aye, that will I, Axebearer," he replied; "sword and buckler, axe or spear."

"It shall be with swords," decided Harald. "Fight your best, Norman; the first drawing of blood decides the combat."

"But I——" cried the Norman flushing, and drawing back his hand.

"Pish!" was the impatient interruption, "I would not have you murdered, I said. Take the sword;" and the hilt was thrust into the squire's reluctant hand.

So by the light of the leaping flames of the great fire, which was poor enough though favouring neither swordsman, the Norman and the Dane got to work. And from their places the onlookers, well understanding their leader's wish to spare the prisoner's life, gave cheering and encouragement

to either party as the fortunes of the combat fluctuated.

The squire was the better master of his weapon, the Dane the quicker and heavier striker; but as they were fighting only to draw blood, Ord's advantage in the latter respect availed him little. Moreover, the Norman was protected by his armour in every part save the head and face; the defence of the Dane did not extend below mid-thigh or cover up the arm below the elbow, a disadvantage the latter made good by his greater nimbleness.

In favour of the Norman the bout closed; a blood-stain, a mere trickle, appeared on Ord's right forearm, and Harald, who had no wish to lose a man to satisfy the troublesome scruples of one who had scant claim to consideration from him, called upon the pair to cease.

"You have won your life, Norman," he said; "take it, and with it this message to your uncle, that by the help of Heaven and my own right arm I will meet him face to face ere seven days be gone, and the gods shall decide which be the one better fitted to live. Show to him his backward path, one of you, and let us begone."

Scarcely had Harald spoken the words than upon the ears of all fell a deep, baying sound, a grand, sonorous cry, musical and long, the prolongations dying away in a low booming note. It was a sound that, once heard, can never be forgotten; the voice of a bloodhound, raised only when the creature has cause to believe it is nearing the end of the trail. Three times was it

repeated ; and from the motionless attitudes into which the hearers had fallen as the warning came to them, all sprang erect, alert and comprehending.

"The dogs!" shouted one man.

There was no need ; all understood. The hounds of Harald by which the Norman troop had been tracked from the inn to the encampment where they had been surprised, had been forgotten when the attackers had retreated, taking the just released prisoner with them. What had happened was plain. The Frenchmen, their assailants vanished, had come upon the two hounds, possibly in the recovering of the loosed horses, and their leader had seized the opportunity. A cast around the encampment would enable the keen-scented brutes to pick up the scent of their master, and Main-de-Fer, gathering his men, had followed, high in hope of coming upon his enemy and striking a blow as sudden, as unlooked for, and more decisive than that which himself had been dealt.

"Aye, the dogs," replied Harald as his man cried out. "'Tis my fault, lads ; I should have remembered them."

"So should all of us," growled a man of middle age, whose scarred face attested a long continuance in the calling of arms. "'Tis no more yours than ours, Axebearer. Well, we must even fight."

"I would it were light," cried another.

"The night is better ; 'twill hide our numbers and make the Frenchmen the more cautious. And the light will come."

"We may never see it."

"What matters that? A rousing fight, a dozen good sword-strokes, a foot of steel through the heart—and Valhalla. What more may be wanted?" grunted the veteran. "By Thor's hammer! a man must die sometime."

"The Valkyries will never choose thee, Olaf Scarface;" and the speaker laughed.

"How is that, thou long-tongued scunnerel?"

"Because they have a liking for a well-featured man."

"Open thy mouth again and I promise thee the maidens shall have no reason to make choice of thee," roared the bantered one. "But thou wilt ne'er see Valhalla; 'tis Nifleheim for thee and such ill-speaking crew as thou art member of."

"'Ware, 'ware, Ulf Svensson," cried a dozen voices; "old Scarface carries a sword between his teeth as well as at his belt."

"If he can strike I can guard."

So with laugh and jest and rough, good-humoured gibing, the war-dogs followed their leader from out the hollow where they had been resting and over the broken ground of the hillside to where he meant to make his stand. None had thought by their speech that death ran but a few hundred yards behind them, that the race with the grim pursuer could have but one ending. Blithe as guests to a wedding feast they went; and, indeed, to a perpetual feast they believed themselves going. Little touched by Christianity, with such belief in what came after death as their old creed taught them, their faith was confidence

in never-ending delights of feasting and fighting in Valhalla for such as died a gallant death, sword in hand. Rude material it might be, but their blood and spirit was that which made of the later Englishman what he was—the staunchest and most courageous fighting man in Christendom.

They rounded the shoulder of a hill, scrambled down a stone-strewn declivity, and gained the entrance of a ravine or cleft. Here the moonlight failed them, and amid the black shadows their leader's voice was their only guide as they groped their way forward.

Escape had no place in Harald's thoughts. That his midnight dash should have produced such result had been far from his calculation ; the leaving behind of the two hounds the Norman knight was using to such good purpose had been an oversight, pure forgetfulness on the part of all. But that things had fallen out as they had the young Northumbrian could not feel grieved. At last was to come trial between himself and the man who, for trivial reason, had become his enemy, and had not hesitated to make use of the most treacherous means for the achieving of his death.

Fair trial it could scarcely be called since the numerical odds in favour of the Norman were so great ; that it should be final trial, however, that the coming fight should decide, once and for all for one of them, the issue between their mutual hate and desire for vengeance, Harald was determined. From the approaching conflict either he or his enemy should not emerge alive.

But to his following he owed it that the advantage begot of numbers against them should be lessened. Hence the retreat from the halting-place in the hollow where the French squire had been permitted to win his freedom. In his wanderings amid the mountains, sometimes afoot and sometimes on horseback, Harald had come to know them as intimately as the natives. Paths there were not, tracks but few; yet so familiar with the ranges had he become, he discovered no difficulty in finding a way.

His was a general's eye; in his journeyings the strategic possibilities of a locality were never overlooked. Here was a pass where a hundred desperate men might stop an army; there a gap where a troop might be concealed; in this place the situation was favourable to the placing of an ambuscade; in that, by the scaling of a cliff, a detachment passing below might be annihilated, crushed out of existence by the rolling down of rocks. It was to such quick apprehension of the military value of place and position that Harald had been so successful in his operations against the Frenchmen.

From the hollow he led his band to a spot that had fixed itself in his memory but two days ago. There he was determined to make his stand, and thither the hounds would follow, true to his scent as a hawk to the lure.

"Whither go we, Axebearer?" asked one as, coming to the end of the ravine, Harald halted in the moonlight to allow of his men joining him.

Behind him rose a line of rocky cliffs, towering with seemingly perpendicular face four hundred feet towards the blue-black, star-specked sky. At the base ran a twelve-foot-wide track, from the near side of which fell away almost straightly the side of the ravine the party had just passed through. Beyond, one way, the white track, easily distinguishable, rose and fell, winding and twisting for a hundred yards ere it was lost sight of; the other, it was cut off, a spear-cast away, by a jutting edge of the cliff. Between this and where they stood the line of the range gave outwards from the track, the cliff receded, so that there was formed a kind of wedge-shaped inlet into the range, the apex of which was the angle formed by the meeting of the irregular rock faces, and the base furnished by the track.

Within this wedge Harald pointed. "Yonder," he replied. "The outer room of Valhalla. Will ye follow?"

The answer was a cheer, a roar of assent that waked the echoes, and reached the ears of the pursuers, now cautiously rounding the shoulder of the hills on the further side of the ravine.

An hour later Robert Main-de-Fer, with two men holding the straining hounds, that plunged and struggled to free themselves to rejoin their master, stood where Harald had stood when asked of his destination. He noted the configuration of the rocks and he chuckled fiercely; his enemy was in a trap, into which he had walked blindly. Waning though the moonlight was, it showed him by the pale glinting on helmet

and spearhead the exact position of his prey. A hundred feet perhaps was the inlet in depth, and half as much again at the mouth. Perhaps the fools thought to be passed by unnoticed; perhaps they were more numerous than he anticipated. He was prudent in his vengeance. He blocked the inlet with his soldiers, and there they waited, each man ready for instant fight, until the night faded into dawn, and the sky over the further mountain summits glowed a dull angry red as the sunrise usurped the darkness of night.

The men-at-arms shivered within their armour; their limbs became numb, and under their breath they cursed their leader; but hate kept him warm. Through the night he remained alert and watchful, his eyes turned to where, thirty yards away, the voices of Harald's fighting men were raised in laugh and jest and roaring sea songs as though no such thing as danger existed within a thousand miles of them.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD

But Redeemed his Pledge

The floor of that inlet in the mountain side was stone, stones in patches of pebbles and flinders, in great boulders, and jagged stretches of naked rock which was the foundation of the mountain range. And the greater stones lay so thickly scattered that use of the horses—such as had been recovered by the Normans—was an impossibility. Moreover, during the night the Danes had built themselves, as Harald had commanded and assisted in the doing, a rampart of the easier lifted blocks. Behind this breast-high wall they stood, or leaned on their elbows, watching their enemies as they made ready for the attack.

On to the wall leaped Harald, and in glad voice he called to the Norman knight.

"At last have you come to do for yourself the work of killing. Better fortune to your arm than those you hired earned."

"English churl," retorted the Norman furiously, and he came two strides forward.

"Nay, I am knight now," Harald interrupted gaily. "Ask of those in York—if any true men remain now that Tostig rules there. I am knight

like yourself. What gave you to Tostig that you might murder my father?"

Then Main-de-Fer poured forth a storm of abuse, and behind Harald, Ulf Svensson asked if he might make a cast at the insulter with his spear.

"At him! Nay, that man is mine," Harald replied. "See ye him, lads? Keep your hands from him when we get to work. His death belongs to me."

Sir Robert, having relieved his soul, turned back to his men, and presently came on, eager for the killing of those—and the smallness of their number, now evident, was additional insult—who had dared beat them up at dead of night and so ignominiously disturb them.

"Dieu aide! Main-de-Fer! Dieu aide!" shouted the men-at-arms as they charged, some spear armed, some with sword and shield; and the Hiberno-Danes replied with that battle-cry which has now come to be no more than a sailors' call to attention or warning hail.

Twenty feet long was the wall, across the narrowest part of the inlet, and with its ends against the cliff sides. Behind it crowded the defenders, those in front with spears, the men behind with axe and sword.

"Aoi! Aoi! Aoi!" they yelled as the edged weapons went swinging upon those attackers who evaded the spearpoints.

"Dieu aide! Down with the English swine!"

Five minutes of fierce hewing and thrusting, with the fighters' hot breath hanging in tiny clouds

on the cold morning air; five minutes of the clash and clang of steel, of hissing exclamations, sharp cries of anger and pain, of frantic cursing and the ringing of stricken mail, and Robert Main-de-Fer, his dark face grown livid with shame and rage beheld his men surge back from the blood-stained rampart. A dozen men lay below it, dead and wounded; as many more of those who had staggered back were streaming with blood; the assault had been repulsed.

He turned on them with fiercely gibing tongue, struck at them with his sword, and putting himself in advance, urged them to the charge again.

Within the wall Harald was encouraging his men. Two dead, were there? But they had died like heroes. This man had used his spear well. Olaf Scarface had never struck a better blow. Let them fight as they had done and victory was theirs. But let no man touch the knight or he would find an enemy other than those outside the wall.

And then they fell to again. Many Normans reached the wall itself. Harald slew two whose hands were tearing at the loose stones, and when they fell the stones rolled with them. To the breach others crowded; more stones were driven inward; others fell outward as the defenders pressed forward; the wall was a broken and jagged line. Protected by his shield, Main-de-Fer fought savagely. Two spears opposed his breast, and the shafts of each he cut through with one blow. Olaf Scarface whirled an axe down upon him; he caught it on his shield, stooped as he

received it and was beaten to his knee, leaped upward and passed half his sword-length through the veteran's body.

"I'm sped," gasped Scarface.

But there was a little life in him. He threw one leg over the wall, a sword-edge gashed it below the knee, but he won his way over, and dropped, staggering, upon his feet. Three sword-blades at once struck him, and his blazing eyes clouded. One more blow he dealt, but so weak his arm, the man was not harmed; and then the old man went down, to be trampled underfoot without a groan. Hard had he lived, and hard did he die.

Hacking and hewing with unwearied arm, Harald Ulfsson stood in the breach that had been made, and no man could drive him hence. Blood trickled from him in half-a-dozen places, but as yet he had escaped serious wound. On either side of him was a spearman, and those nearing the breach who escaped their weapons found death at his hands. A pile of bodies huddled into every strange position was at his feet.

And once more the Frenchmen recoiled. Stubborn and courageous soldiers as they were, they were daunted by the desperate valour of the defenders. As a dog will retreat growling from unsuccessful attempt to win a bone from another more powerful, they backed from the broken wall, and either side gained sorely needed breathing space.

Harald looked around. More than half of his band was gone, and of the survivors scarce one

but carried wounds. But their eyes met his undauntedly; they leaned, gasping, on their notched swords, but not one showed trace of fear.

"Will ye give in if your lives are spared?" he asked them between panting breaths.

"No," replied some; others, more spent, could but shake their heads.

None the less he turned from them and went a little way beyond the breach, and he shouted the name of Main-de-Fer.

"Norman," he panted, "this quarrel is 'twixt you and me. Will you fight it out man to man, so that these brave fellows' lives shall be spared?"

"I make not terms with an outlaw," was the reply.

"Have you fear to fight me?"

"English swine! Shalt be taken and hanged. That is fitter end to thee than death by a knight's sword."

"Which cannot compass so much," sneered Harald. "I had thought you a brave man, Norman."

"Hew him down."

But no man stirred; they stood irresolute, daunted by the sight of the splendid young Englishman.

"He is bewitched," muttered one man.

"They are devils, not men."

"Men or devils, here is one who does not fear them."

Hoarsely and angrily were the words shouted, and from amongst the group of soldiers ran out

one man. Bare headed he was, and Harald knew him to be the young man whom he had carried from Main-de-Fer's tent in mistake for the knight himself. Bravely had he borne himself in the fight; the sword given him wherewith to win his freedom was clenched tightly in his hand. With a rush he was upon Harald, his weapon uplifted, and before the Englishman could guard himself, he had struck a downward blow at his head. It beat Harald to his knees; a shower of sparks flew upward, and the blade snapped in half-a-score fragments, leaving but the hilt and a few inches of jagged steel in the squire's hand. Continuing his fierce rush, the Norman fairly leaped the wall and fell to stabbing with his broken blade.

"Save him," shouted Harald, as he rose.

But the command came too late; the gallant youth was already dead.

And then Harald himself was surrounded and struggling desperately, all but overwhelmed in a rush from the men-at-arms, heartened by his fall, or shamed into movement by the act of the squire.

And Harald had died then and there, but that the surviving Danes tore through the breach or flung themselves over the wall, and, with irresistible rush, drove back the Frenchmen and rescued him. Thereafter the fight became a confused and blind striking of blows, wherein men had no time or opportunity of guarding, but fought with no other thought than to kill an opponent, even though himself receiving his death wound the following instant.

But while it lasted, Harald Ulfsson continued to make good the promise he had made to himself that day when he went up from Whitby harbour to seek the welcome that was denied him and learned that he had neither kin nor home. Face to face he met Sir Robert Main-de-Fer. Those who had stood between died beneath his axe, and Sir Robert died likewise. It was but an instant the pair looked into each other's eyes, but in that instant the Norman's face changed colour. He read his death in the glance of the man who, for such slight cause, had aroused his hatred, and who had so successfully defied his attempts at treacherous slaughter. This time himself was the victim. Hemmed in by his own men, there was no room for escape. His feeble guard was insufficient to turn aside the swinging axe, and he went down before the blow.

Then, seeing his enemy fall thus, something of that wild Berserker rage which once before had come to him filled Harald. He charged the Frenchmen, and followed by two of his band who still remained alive, he broke through them and gained the track. The three had vanished around the jutting spur of the cliff before the men-at-arms started in pursuit, but they were too late. Unscalable as the cliff face appeared, there were, as one saw on closer examination, cracks, fissures, and projections, by which a daring and strong-nerved climber might make his way upward, if not to the summit, at least sufficiently far to place himself beyond reach of those who might stand below.

Twenty feet upward, clinging like snails to the face of a wall, were the three ere the Frenchmen appeared. Unheeding the yells and threats that pursued them, the climbers drew themselves still higher. An arrow would have fetched them down, but bow and arrows were not carried by the Norman horsemen; and though of the many stones hurled at them by their angry foes more than one reached its mark, the effect was insufficient to cause loosening of hand or foothold. Leaving a trail of blood behind them, Harald and his companions reached a ledge where they could sit in safety; nor was there among the Frenchmen one so foolhardy as to attempt to follow them.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH

How Harald's Outlawry was Removed

The remnant of Sir Robert Main-de-Fer's troop found its way back to where lay the Norman army, and when the tale was told, Ralph the Norman, in high wrath that one of his chief captains and friends should have been so slain, swore a mighty oath that the insolence of the rebels should receive its due reward. Griffith and Aelfgar should be forced to fight; and the Norman leader promised himself that when the battle was gained there should be a gallows erected, and by the hanging of every one in ten of the prisoners, who remained to be taken, should the traitor earl and his allies learn how severe could be a Norman's vengeance. And first of all who should hang was that most pestilent and hardy traitor and outlaw, Harald Ulfsson.

But if the will to such end were good, the ability to gain it was weak. The Norman army marched in conformity with Ralph's intention, and to his surprise he found the rebels not averse to meeting him. For he gave them, being an unskilful general, choice of ground, and such was not to the advantage of the Frenchmen.

The latter attacked the Welsh drawn up upon a hill-side: the first mistake of Ralph. His troops charged in a dense body without his having first taken care that the intervening ground was clear. It was not. The Frenchmen had laughed to scorn the insignificant force opposed to them; it was not until later they made the discovery that those they saw represented not a third of the Welsh army. The rest, principally bowmen and light spearmen, were concealed about the ground over which the Frenchmen had to pass. Such had been Harald Ulfsson's counsel, and the value of such disposition was quickly made known.

Within two hundred yards of the main body, the mail-clad Frenchmen, their horses half blown, were assailed by clouds of arrows and javelins. Instantly they were thrown into confusion. They attempted to turn; either way a continuous discharge of missiles met them. Welshmen sprang up from under their very feet, stabbing the horses, hamstringing them, and then dispatching the fallen riders. Scores of the hillmen were slain, but their number seemed legion. And then it was that Griffith saw the wisdom of those who had counselled inaction and avoidance until then. Daily, fighting men had come in to his standard, so that when the battle was fought his troops outnumbered the English army by two to one.

Galled by the roving footmen, stung to death by the arrows, their formation a hindrance to them, the wretched Frenchmen plunged and struggled in vain endeavour to withdraw themselves, to right the confusion. But the time was

not given them. Amid the tossing mass below Aelfgar suddenly observed a white banner arise. It was the signal agreed upon by Harald Ulfsson, to whom had been given leadership of the men concealed upon the broken ground.

"Now comes our turn," he shouted.

He lifted his sword, and like a river in flood the sword- and spear-men, whose impatience to fall upon their enemy had been hardly restrained, swept down the hill-side. An unbridled torrent, they burst upon the Norman knights and men-at-arms and overwhelmed them. In vain the latter sought to rally. Crippled by the arrow flights, without room wherein to move, they perished in their hundreds. The overthrow became a defeat, the defeat a carnage. Ralph the Norman abandoned the men he had so disgracefully misled, and fled in shame.

The rout was complete. The third division of the English army—if English it might be called—fled without striking a single blow. Of the first and second lines those who were lucky enough to extricate themselves followed their example. Thousands were slain ; hundreds laid down their weapons and begged for mercy from the foe they had derided and laughed at, whose tactics they had despised, whose courage they had declared did not exist.

The defeat of Ralph the Norman opened the road to the heart of England. Hereford was reached by the Welsh army, and there they halted to plunder. And then came news of the advance of an English army, an army of Englishmen, with

Harold Godwinsson at the head. Aelfgar and Harald counselled retreat. To war with England was not the former's design; his plan was to prove himself so powerful that his sentence of outlawry might be rescinded and himself reinstated in all his former dignity. The Welsh prince demurred.

"We have defeated one army, why not a second?" he demanded.

But Earl Harold was not Ralph the Norman, and so Griffith was persuaded. The Welshmen retired; and Harold, whose judgment was sufficiently sound and foresight keen enough to be aware that dissension in England between the great nobles was antagonistic to the vital interests of the country, was more ready to treat than to fight. He did not wish to injure Aelfgar, he said, but to preserve the peace and unity of the kingdom.

Wherefore the two armies held apart, and negotiations took the place of raids and skirmishes. For himself Aelfgar claimed the restitution of his earldom of East Anglia which had been given to Gurth, Harold's brother, the removal of his outlawry, and unconditional absolution for his share in the war, which had been undertaken merely for the enforcing and recovery of his rights. Prince Griffith required the acknowledgment of his independence.

To these several demands Harold agreed in the name of the king, though from the Welsh prince he demanded hostages for the keeping of good faith.

But what of Harald Ulfsson? When he learned

of what had been accomplished by the peace-makers, he betook himself to the reinstated earl and bluntly inquired what interest, if any, had been made on his behalf. None, Aelfgar was obliged to confess, and looked very blank. So busy had he been in arranging matters comfortably for himself and his father-in-law that the concerns of those who had aided him to the position enabling him to treat on equal terms with the virtual ruler of England had been entirely forgotten.

"For naught have I then spent myself," Harald cried bitterly. "I had as well gone a Viking cruise—and better, seeing that what I earned I should have had."

"What want you?" the earl asked peevishly.

Help when one is in need of it is thought much of; when the occasion has passed the recollection goes also.

"Justice," was the reply. "The removal of my outlawing, the lands of my father which have gone from me."

"As to that I can do naught; Harold Godwinsson is the man."

"And this is the brother of Hereward Leofricsson!"

"What mean you?"

"What I say. Your brother had ne'er left a friend in the lurch."

"'Tis hard enough to get justice for oneself, without winning it for others."

"A thought I shall bear in mind," was the dry retort. "I have been fool enough to fight for

others as well as myself these past six months. I shall be wiser henceforward."

"What would you have me do?"

"Naught; what a man will not do willingly I had rather be without. I had thought the brother of Hereward would have somewhat of Hereward in him. I am mistaken. It is for mine own hand henceforth;" and Harald flung out of the room.

He was the ladder by which men climbed to the top of a wall, and having reached there, and able of themselves to jump down to the other side, kicked away behind them.

He went to the remnant of those who had followed him from Swansea Bay and told them of the fate likeliest to be theirs—and his.

"I am outlaw," he said; "you are, or ought to be, the same. Without doubt since we have none but ourselves to rely upon, Harold Godwinsson will hang us do we stay here, if only to keep peace with the Frenchmen who are left."

At this piece of news the men looked glum and asked what was best for them to do. Harald said he would like to hear what was in their minds. There was nothing, apparently; but after some thought one suggested that their position might be improved by the cutting off forthwith of Earl Aelfgar's head.

This, the leader pointed out, might be a relief to their feelings, but was scarcely likely otherwise to benefit them.

They thought again, and came to the conclusion it was Harold Godwinsson's head that ought to be cut off.

To this again their leader demurred; the feat was possible, certainly, but it made their subsequent hanging a surety.. And hanging was a matter, as he judged, they were all anxious to avoid. So they gave up thinking.

"Settle then for us, Axebearer, what we are to do," they said; "we will be content;" and relieved of all further anxiety, they resumed the filling and passing of the ale-cup, which occupation Harald's entry to them had interrupted.

With a dozen lives as well as his own thus in his charge, Harald went away to think the matter out; and finding no solution to the difficulty, went to saddle his horse. He rode through the English camp, whither he, in attendance upon his leaders, with other chiefs, had come, and a hundred pairs of eyes were turned on him. His noble and graceful bearing, the width of his shoulders, the strength and ease with which he sat his horse, and the war-hardened appearance of one who yet carried the stamp of youth, were themes for comment and criticism. The Frenchmen scowled; the English spoke their approval and wondered who the young hero might be.

"A devil! 'Twas he gave me this;" and a Norman knight who had been one of the many released prisoners Harald had sent back as bearer of his message to Main-de-Fer, touched his right arm, shortened midway between elbow and wrist. "A devil who fights with an axe."

"A Dane?" queried an East Anglian thane of Earl Gurth's following.

"I know not. 'Tis likely. A savage of some fierce breed," answered the Norman.

Whereat the Englishman smiled, and thought none the worse of Harald Ulfsson.

The Earl of Wessex coming through the camp with Aelfgar passed Harald. The Northumbrian never looked at the earl, but he did at Aelfgar, and the son of Leofric changed colour.

"Who was that?" asked Harold Godwinsson as they rode on.

"One who fought with me."

"He seemed to have no liking of you, earl."

"Nay, he is a fierce man."

"What is he?"

"Outlaw," Aelfgar said viciously. He had read no comfort in the Northumbrian's contemptuous, threatening glance.

"An outlaw! He bears himself boldly then. How is he named?"

"The Axebearer men call him. The Frenchmen know him—some too well. Ask of them. Harald Ulfsson is his name, and an ardent fighter he is."

"Ulfsson! Harald Ulfsson!" Earl Harold was striving to recollect the name. "An outlaw, too; comes he from the north?"

"It may be," Aelfgar said carelessly. "He was an ill handful for your Frenchmen to grasp."

"Then why speak you ill of him?" asked the earl bluntly. "A friend who fought so well for you."

"Nay, no friend," Aelfgar said hastily. "And

though he fought for me 'twas rather that he might come upon his enemy, a Norman knight, Sir Robert Main-de-Fer, against whom he had some quarrel."

"I call to mind this Ulfsson now."

The earl glanced shrewdly at his companion. He knew Aelfgar well, knew the weakness that kept him ever from standing alone; the selfishness that saw nothing except his own immediate profit. But that he was anxious there should be peace between himself and the great Earl of Mercia, Aelfgar and his father-in-law would have been forced into submission by the sword instead of persuaded into peace. He guessed what might have passed between the reinstated noble and his supporter, and his thoughts were not unfavourable to the latter. Outlaw was he? Why yes, he called to mind the scene in the king's court at Winchester. But that was two years ago and the matter was long forgotten. And the young man had proved himself a daring and successful warrior in Scotland; stories of him had come south. And it was himself had given Osberne Siwardsson the word to take the lad northward. But Earl Harold had had many things to occupy his mind since then, and Harald Ulfsson had passed clean out of his recollection.

Well, he was a gallant knight; England had need of more such as he. True, he was Tostig's man now, and Tostig was inclined to be more than commonly obstinate. Still even with him his brother could sometimes do what he willed. As for the matter of Sir Robert Main-de-Fer's killing,

well, it was a pity ; but once done it could not be helped ; the Frenchmen would have to make the best of it—or the worst ; thank Heaven there were not so many of them now in the country. Besides, he was a greater man with the king than ever his father had been. As for Aelfgar—but there, the fox and the mastiff could not be expected to remain friends for long.

Thus, having all good intentions to Harald Ulfsson, the Earl of Wessex sent the next morning, and found him gone. Nor could any one say whither.

For Harald had come back from his long ride sufficiently satisfied that his suspicions of Harold Godwinsson were only too likely to be realized. Did he wish to keep his head upon his shoulders he must go where his hand might have the opportunity of defending it.

Therefore, when he returned, he quietly got his Ost-Danes together and took them out of the camp. If any saw them go they were too wise to hinder them. The men followed him willingly enough, content in belief of his fair dealing with them. They did not ask where they were going, but five miles from the camp he told them, and also what he intended doing. The news delighted them.

"Free Danes and sea cocks," he said to them. "Sith there is no surety for us otherwise, I am going to take Harold Godwinsson."

"And cut off his head?" they asked cheerfully, never doubting but that the taking would be an easy thing to do.

"Nay, he is worth more alive than dead."

"How is that?" inquired the simple-minded ones, who saw lesser danger in a dead enemy than a live one.

"Because we shall gain naught if he be dead; when alive he can do much for us, once we have him between our fingers. Moreover, Godwinsson though he is, he is too good a man to kill."

That they could not understand at all, but they took his word for it. They still needed enlightenment as to what was to be made of the earl when they had got him.

So Harald told them, and so simple was it they saw the point at once. The earl (no matter his faults) was an honest man, and also a powerful one, more so than the king even. He had but to lift his hand and they were inlaw again, and no man could say nay to them. They would be free to go where they listed, as good men as any in the country. What they might do after was at their own choice.

Harald spoke them frankly. He desired his outlawing removed. There was no reason why the lands in Northumbria should be seized by Tostig, or any one else who chose, so long as he remained alive, their lawful holder. He did not mean another should have them. But he would not be put inlaw, be made a free and honest man, while they, his comrades, remained liable to be hanged. The advantage he wished for they should share in; leave them to shift for themselves, as Aelfgar had done, he would not. And when they were honest men again maybe they

would go with him to his Northumbrian home. But that was as they liked.

To this the rovers agreed. They saw no great benefit to themselves in the suggestion; as outlaws they had hitherto done sufficiently well for themselves, but as it was to the advantage of their beloved leader they consented blithely.

To take Earl Harold was a matter easier said than done, however. To carry him away from the village where the army lay camped was out of the question; the opportunity was sought when he went hunting. For four days Harald and his men skulked in and about likely places, and each day they were disappointed. The Earl of Wessex came, it was true, but he was always attended with so many companions that the attempt would have been hopeless.

But on the sixth day luck changed. Hiding in a dingle, one of the Ost-Danes saw the hunting-party enter the wood with hound and bow and spear, and at once hurried off to acquaint his fellows. A convenient lurking-place was chosen, and there the party waited, the while the wood rang with the sound of cheering voices, the baying of the hounds, and calls upon hunting-horns. Now nearer, now away the chase swept; hunters passed where Harald lay concealed, little knowing of the many pairs of eyes that beheld them. Full of hope the lurking party waited.

And fortune favoured them. The quarry, after a lengthy run, sweeping back in a circle, was pulled down within a hundred yards of where they lay. They heard the mort sounded, and a

while after a single hunter came down the glade. They stepped out, six behind and six in front of him, and Harald's hands seized his rein. The horseman was the Earl of Wessex. An expression of surprise came into his eyes, his hand went to his sword hilt, and then he laughed.

"What would you, Harald Ulfsson?" he said, smiling.

"No noise," was the reply. Hidden by the greenwood, the voices of those gathered around the dead buck could be plainly heard. "Not a sound, earl, for your life's sake," Harald cried warningly.

And quietly, too easily as it seemed, Harold Godwinsson submitted. Still he was smiling.

They led the horse into a thicket and there left it. With haste, yet with great noiselessness, they took their unresisting prisoner deeper and deeper into the wood. Evidently they had explored it thoroughly, for they pursued their way without hesitation. At last they reached a wide clearing where the bracken-stalks stood above a tall man's height, and threaded their way to a tiny sand-pit, choked and overgrown with greenery. Into this they descended, and a man might have passed by within a dozen yards without knowing what was within.

"And now, my lord earl, we will talk," said Harald, bidding his prisoner sit down. The Danes stood around, leaning on their weapons, but showing no great curiosity.

"If it please you," was the smooth answer.

Harald looked at his prisoner sharply. He had

scarce expected so easy a capture, and the earl's demeanour puzzled him. That he could have expectation of assistance was beyond all considering. None had witnessed the surprise; to search the wood thoroughly would take hours.

"I demand—" the earl raised his eyebrows, then nodded his head; he seemed more amused than aught else—"I demand justice."

"Is that all? I had looked for somewhat else. Yet every man believes his cause just. Go on, Harald Ulfsson."

"You know me, then?"

"My Lord Aelfgar gave me your name."

"Did the thankless user of better men's lives give you aught else? Did he tell you that, left to himself, even Ralph the Norman had put him down? Did he compound with you for aught that his mean, pitiful self would not receive? Nay; shame of his blood! his brain travels no further than the needs of his own body; and those that stood between him and ill may go hang for aught he cares."

"Is it justice against Aelfgar you seek? Though by my soul, knight—but this is a new and strange method of asking for justice."

"'Tis the only way. How may a man get what is his due save by the strength of his right arm sith he be not one to cringe, and lie, and cheat, and truckle for it? And such way is not mine, sir earl. With what justice was I outlawed? Was it justice that sent the foreign dog to my home to murder and sack, and take that which no man had right to give? Justice is for him,

methinks, who hath the strength and the boldness to seize it, not for the man who is content to wait until it cometh to him. Therefore have I seized thee, earl."

"And do I then stand for justice?"

"Many a man acts the just part when 'tis not open to him to play another," Harald replied grimly.

"You threaten!"

"Nay, I have but taken an opportunity for the asking for my own which will insure my being heard."

For a while Earl Harold sat silent; his face was grave, yet the light of some secret merriment sat in his blue eyes.

"Earl Aelfgar said of you that you were a fierce and desperate man, Harald Ulfsson."

"Then for once hath Earl Aelfgar spoken truth."

"And your meaning is that harm will come to me if your demands be not granted?"

"The claims of a friendless man are apt to be overlooked. Such an one am I, earl; and I do but present mine in a fashion that wins for them attention."

"And what then? What if I will do naught for you?"

"'Tis said Harold Godwinsson is a just man; surely he would not lose the honour," Harald replied cunningly.

"Yet you deem it necessary to bring such potent arguments as these"—the earl waved his hand at the Ost-Danes—"to keep him in the way of

retaining it, eh? I fear me, Harald Ulfsson, you have but a poor opinion of me after all;" and the earl laughed heartily.

"That I have I have; that I have not may never come," the Northumbrian said doggedly.

Yet whatever his feelings towards the Godwinsson, he could not but admire Harold's bearing, the royal air, the sagacity and kindliness in the frank blue eyes. Godwinsson or not, this was a man before him; one in whom everything bespoke the leader of men; a man of courage and kingly honour; who would not speak one way and act entirely differently; who could win love and esteem as well as command respect; and whom no other man need feel it shame to follow. Were it asked of him, Harald Ulfsson could, and feel he would lose naught thereby, put his hands between the earl's and become his man.

To him there came a feeling of self-reproach that he had done as he had; the colour came into his face, and his mind was troubled. The earl, with a faint smile at his lip corners, watched him closely.

At last he swung round, motioning to the soldiers to move aside.

"You are free," he said abruptly; "free and safe, Harold Godwinsson, from me and mine."

"And with thee too," and the earl rose to his feet.

He came to the Northumbrian and stood before him, taller by the forehead, his right hand on Harald's shoulder.

"Didst think I feared thee, Harald Ulfsson?"

he said, gaily, but with a soberness underlying the mirth. "Nay, not from when thou laidst hand on bridle until now; for I knew thee noble and incapable of aught but nobility. As a brother I love thee, and would there were more of thy spirit; and of those we love we have no fear. I looked for no harm from thee, or I had never come here as I have. I have no great trust in this Welshman or his son-in-law; and had I chosen to blow a call when my rein was seized, two hundred knights had come down the glade after me, and thou and these men would have been seized ere a dozen steps had been taken. But I was glad of the meeting. I have wanted thee, sought thee, but thou wert gone. Hence I came willingly to-day; for I had news to give: to tell thee that thou art again inlaw by my hand and without appeal to the husting. And now, as the hunters will be looking for us, we will save them the trouble by going to them."

"I have found a man," was the explanation that Earl Harold gave when he rejoined the soldiers, huntsmen, and attendants who had been seeking him in alarm.

And if there were questioning glances cast askance at Harald Ulfsson and his Danes as they returned with the hunting-party to the camp, none appealed to them more directly for explanation of the earl's words.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH

And what came After

Of what befell Harald Ulfsson during the years that followed his meeting with the Earl of Wessex in the greenwood there is no need to tell, until came the "barley month" of the year 1066. In the interval, Harald, Lord of Olafsdale, though no good friend to Earl Tostig, spent his years, as had his father before him, in the chase, the management of his lands, voyages in his long ship, and assisting Harold Godwinsson in the subjugation of the Welsh, whose incursions into England kept the whole of the west in a state of turmoil and bloodshed.

But when came that September when Harald Hardraade, allied with the deposed Tostig, made his appearance in the Humber and marched to the taking of York, the Lord of Olafsdale, answering the call to arms of Morkar, the new earl, mustered his huscarles and all servants capable of bearing arms, and marched to join the northern array.

That the Norsemen were victors in the battle fought near Fulford was no fault of Harald Ulfsson, but rather due to the indecision and want of

military skill of Morkar and his brother Edwin. Escaping from the battle, Harald had held aloof. From York came a messenger to him.

"The King of Norway enters this city. Will you join him? England is at his feet. Northumbria is with him."

Harald sent the messenger back with this message:

"Did I dream of being traitor to my country I would be so at my own bidding, not that of others."

So the citizens of York, fearful of their glorious minster—and their own skins, for they dreaded Hardraade—opened their gates; hostages were exchanged, and the north pledged itself to follow the Norwegian king, to help him drive Harold Godwinsson off the throne to which the Witan-agemote had elected him, and to place the crown of England on his head.

"Give me a hundred such men as the Axe-bearer, and England is mine," said seven foot Harold.

Harald and his axe had been noticed in Fulford fight.

"He is Norsk like ourselves; tell him I will give him to Northumbria as its jarl when England is conquered."

And that message, too, was brought to the son of Ulf.

"Tell the king," sent back Harald in reply, "that Norsk is Norsk, and English is English; that I am English, and not for England's crown would I fight under the Raven banner. More-

over, if he be a wise man, the king will go back to his own country, for anon there will be one here against whom even he will be unable to stand."

Whereat Hardraade laughed, and said he would like to see the man.

And ere long his wish was gratified. The news of the Northmen's invasion travelled south, and King Harold, weary of waiting for the threatened coming of William of Normandy, his army, eager for home and harvest, having left him, gathered together his huscarles, his thanes, and the fighting men of Wessex, and marching with such speed that none but the stoutest of his following could keep pace with him, reached York on September 25th, much to the surprise of the citizens; thence he followed the Norwegian king and Tostig, his brother, to where their army lay on either side of the river Derwent at Stamford Bridge.

"This must be Harold," said Ulfsson when a hind came to where he lay at Sutton-in-the-Forest, with the news that the bells of York were ringing, and a great host had gone through with a yellow-bearded man riding at their head. "Now, my merry men all, up and follow, for we are like to see some fighting."

And fighting they did see, their own lord being the one to set them example, when they came up with King Harold's army—though it was no great host—engaged in driving the Norsemen into the Derwent.

Too late was Harald to hear made the offer to

Hardraade of seven feet of English soil, seeing that he was of greater height than most men; and too late was he to engage with that giant Norseman whose single axe kept the river bridge until sixteen of the Wessex men had bitten the dust, giving his comrades time to form into battle array, and who had then been slain by a long spear driven into his back between the bridge planks by a man floating in a boat in the stream below. But he was none too late to cleave a path with his great axe into the shield-protected ranks of the second part of the Norwegian army, and he it was who conveyed the king's message to the discomfited remnant of the finest force that had ever left the Norwegian coast, giving them leave to go in peace.

To York Harald Ulfsson accompanied his king; but punishment of the traitorous citizens was interfered with, for in hot haste came a messenger to the city with the news that William the Norman had landed at Pevensey, and there set up a fort the while his troops ravaged the surrounding country.

On Senlac Hill on October 14th, Harold's hastily-gathered army awaited the onslaught of the Norman host. The Fighting Man standard of Wessex was set up on the hill summit, and about it stood the king, his brothers Gurth and Leofwine, and Harald Ulfsson, the only one of the warriors of Northumbria to rally to the banner of England's king in the defence of England. Weak, selfish, and jealous as their father Aelfgar, Edwin and Morkar held aloof. They had been glad of

Harold's aid three weeks earlier, when the Northmen overran their earldom, but they would give none in return when the south was threatened.

"Like father, like son," exclaimed Harald Ulfsson, when Earl Morkar came to him and forbade him, being his overlord, giving his aid to Harold.

"What mean you?" asked the earl.

"That he ne'er thought of any one but himself."

"Harold is no ruler over us," was the haughty rejoinder.

"If the Frenchman defeat Harold and win England, think you he will be satisfied unless he have Northumbria too?" Harald asked. "I trow not. And we in Olafsdale have seen enough of Frenchmen and to spare."

"William or Harold, what matters who rules south of the Humber?" asked Morkar.

"What matters? You will see. But as I said before, like father, like son."

So Harald Ulfsson was in Senlac fight, and though his arm was ten years older, it fell none the less heavily on the Bretons and the men of Maine and Anjou and Normandy than it had on the soldiers of Robert Main-de-Fer amid the Welsh mountains.

But good general as was Harold, William of Normandy was a better, and the fates fought against the Saxons. The axes of the king, of Harald, of Gurth, and a hundred others as brave, could not overcome the discipline of the Frenchmen, the tactics of their general, and the flights of arrows shot point upwards into the air. The

day was lost, though from sunrise to sunset was occupied ere the stubborn English were worsted, and the Pope-blessed and consecrated banner erected in place of the standard of Wessex.

From the stricken field when the dusk of evening fell Harald drew off with what the Norman steel had left of those he had brought down from the north. Harold the king was dead with an arrow in his brain; Gurth had fallen before the sword of the Norman duke; and the surviving English were flying in all directions. To stay longer was useless. No pursuit was there; the fighting had been sufficient for one day, and fifteen thousand Normans had perished on the field; with what had been done William was satisfied.

To London went Harald, and thence north to the earls Morkar and Edwin. But even by what he said they were not to be aroused to action. William, said they, would be content with Wessex and Mercia and East Anglia, he would not venture north of Humber; they were safe.

"Were my father's lands safe?" demanded Harald angrily. "And they were in Northumbria. And if Sir Robert Main-de-Fer would venture so far for the stealing of lands, is Duke William likely to show less enterprise? 'Tis your jealousy and that of those like you that hath undone England. The Norman will take you one by one. 'Tis England he covets, not the half of it; and when he hath mastered all the rest shall we of Northumbria be strong enough to drive him out? But ye are the sons of your fathers."

And true enough Harald's words proved, but

the earls saw it too late. Perhaps in his weeks of wandering before his attendants slew him and cut off his head and took it to William in hope of reward, and were duly hanged, Edwin thought of the prophecy. Morkar, in his imprisonment, which lasted through the whole of William's reign and ran into that of his red-haired son, assuredly had time for such thought. But their thinking came over late. Better have acted earlier, and died as heroes.

So Harald went to another leader. He played his part when York was burned, and the foolish and weak Waltheof gave a glimpse of the blood of his father. He was with Hereward in the eastern fens when the Danes of Sweyn burned Peterborough. He helped in the defence of the Camp of Refuge; and when the treachery of the Ely monks lost that last stronghold of English liberty, he was with Hereward.

But unlike Hereward, who, sick at heart and in mind, made peace with the Norman and found his death not long after, Harald did not lay down his arms and go in to the Conqueror and be his man. Into Cumberland he went, with which, as King Malcolm's land, William did not trouble himself greatly, though making the Scottish king do homage for the holding; and there, in one of the lonely dales above the great lake now called Windermere, he lived in such peace as coast-raiders and Galloway thieves would permit, rearing stout sons to fight as well as himself, and founding a family which, for whatever else it won distinction, has proved the worth of its Scandi-

navian blood in every contention, internal or foreign, wherein Englishmen have been engaged since the coming of William the Conqueror made of England a United Kingdom.

And to this Cumberland home with Harald went the black horse, good yet, its eighteen years notwithstanding, to carry its master even in his war gear—though not so speedily or unweariedly as before. On the colts that it sired rode the sons of its master when they went against the Border rogues whose raids prevented rusting from inaction, but when at last death came to the gallant creature, Harald buried with it saddle and bridle, and thenceforth he rode no more; no horse was there to him as the black, and to his later fightings he preferred to go afoot.

THE END